

DN disabilitynow

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Equality groups slate green paper

BY KATHARINE QUARMBY

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has accused the government of taking “a huge step backwards” over equality laws, after it published its new proposals for single equalities legislation.

It was joined by other equality organisations and the Mayor of London in voicing strenuous criticism of a government consultation paper on the future framework for single equalities laws.

The green paper*, published last month, aims to make equality law clearer by condensing nine pieces of legislation into one new law and to consult on whether there are significant gaps in protection that should be plugged.

It contains proposals to compel private landlords to install equipment such as chairlifts and ramps for disabled tenants (who would have to pay), ban single-sex clubs and

increase the protection available to women who want to breast-feed in public.

The government also wants to discuss whether the concept of “reasonable adjustment” should be extended to other groups, apart from disabled people.

But the green paper fails to strengthen legal penalties against discriminatory businesses and employers.

The DRC has also criticised the green paper for failing to simplify the legal process for those who need to have claims of discrimination heard and for removing the requirement for public bodies to have a written equality scheme.

The legal duty for all public bodies to publish a disability equality scheme was only introduced in December, along with the duty to promote equality for disabled people (the disability equality duty).

Caroline Gooding, the DRC's director of legislative

change, said: “The proposals drive a coach and horses through the disability equality duty (DED). This is a huge step backwards. We will use all our efforts to oppose some of the weakening of the DED.”

RADAR also criticised the green paper. Its chief executive, Liz Sayce, said: “The green paper that has been produced is a missed opportunity to establish legislation that will be sufficient to enable real equality.”

Organisations campaigning for equal rights for women were also critical. The Fawcett Society and the Equal Opportunities Commission drew attention to the fact that the consultation paper failed to discuss equal pay.

The Mayor of London was scathing about the green paper, criticising its rejection of “representative legal actions or a uniform system of equality tribunals to hear discrimination cases. It suggests no strengthen-



NUALA CALVI

Government proposals will affect Alison Lapper and other disabled women and groups pressing for equality

ing of penalties so that employers are deterred from discriminating”.

But Trevor Phillips, who chairs the new super body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, which will take over the enforcement of equality in three months' time, welcomed the proposals.

He said the “government is right to address the impenetrable thicket of equality legislation that too often leaves everyone baffled as to what our rights might be”.

**The Discrimination Law Review. The consultation closes on 4 September. See www.communities.gov.uk*

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Help us produce your new-look DN

This autumn, *DN* will be changing.

Over the next few months, we will start to introduce the improvements I promised readers in December.

One of the most important of these – a totally new look and format for *DN*, the first in its 23-year history – will be unveiled later this year.

We will be working with design experts and disabled people to ensure that our new *DN* will keep all the parts our readers like, while becoming sharper, brighter and even more enjoyable to read.

But to do this, we need to hear from you, our readers, about what you would like to see in the new *DN*.

Which features do you like, which could you live without, and how could

we improve what we do?

I need to hear your views. You can contact me in any of the usual ways, via telephone (020 7619 7326), fax (020 7619 7331), text-phone (020 7619 7332), email (john.pring@scope.org.uk), or write to me at *DN*, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW.

Over the next few months, I will keep you updated every issue on our progress, both with the redesign and the other vital changes, including the ongoing search for a new permanent, disabled editor, and the setting up of an independent editorial panel to help us keep in touch with the views of disabled people. It should be an exciting few months.

John Pring, acting editor



On the cover: Gordon Brown. See Profile, page 16. Picture © Toby Melville/Reuters

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newsstand distribution

If you have problems obtaining DN through your newsagent or supermarket, please call MMC on 01483 211 222
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alternative formats

Disability Now is also available on cassette, disk or via email from Talking Newspapers Enterprises
Tel: 01435 862 737
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Published by Scope, a registered charity, no 208231
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Printed and mailed by Affinity Connected Ltd
ISSN 0958-4676

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Bad blood: the scandal deepens

BY SUNIL PECK

Government files relating to the supply of contaminated NHS blood may have been deliberately destroyed, a former secretary of state has told an inquiry.

The independent inquiry into the supply of contaminated blood to people with haemophilia in the 1970s and early 1980s heard the evidence from Lord Jenkin of Roding, who was secretary of state for health and social services from 1979-1981.

He told the inquiry that it had later been made clear to him that files relating to the issue may have been destroyed as a "conscious decision".

The Department of Health now claims the destruction was "inadvertent". In an interview with *DN*, Lord Jenkin said he found it impossible to reconcile

the "strange conflict" between these two accounts.

The inquiry, chaired by Lord Archer of Sandwell QC (*DN June, News focus*) was set up after the government refused repeatedly to hold a public inquiry.

In a separate development, the Scottish Executive has announced its intention to hold a public inquiry into the tragedy.

A spokesman said: "The Scottish government believes in a more accountable health service, and a public inquiry in Scotland to find out why people were infected with hepatitis through NHS treatment is the best way forward."

He added: "Clearly, we will wish to assess the findings of the Archer inquiry before deciding exactly when and how to proceed."

The decision by the Scottish

Executive came after the election of a new minority administration, led by the Scottish Nationalist Party.

The Haemophilia Society estimates that 550 people in Scotland with the condition have been infected with Hepatitis C from contaminated blood, and 87 of them have also been infected with HIV. Its chairman, Roddy Morrison, welcomed the inquiry.

Philip Dolan, chairman of the Scottish Haemophilia Forum, told *DN* that a government inquiry would have more power than the ongoing Archer inquiry.

He said the current indepen-



JOHN WATNEY/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

dent inquiry has no judicial powers and the government can ignore its findings.

Ban agreed on adult wards for kids with mental health issues

The Mental Health Alliance (MHA) has welcomed new government amendments to the mental health bill as a sign that it has started to listen to people who "live and work" with the act.

The amendments have been tabled following discussions between the government and organisations including the Mental Health Coalition (MHC), which represents mental health professionals.

The amendments mean children with mental health problems under 18 would not be placed on adult wards, unless an adult ward would be more suitable, and people subject to the act should have a statutory right to an advocate such as their carer to speak on their behalf.

The government has also tabled an amendment to limit the restrictions that can be imposed on people who are subject to community treatment orders (CTOs).

Andy Bell, chair of the MHA, said: "We hope that today's changes mark the beginning of a new government approach to this issue that will lead to a genuine consensus before the bill becomes law."

Mr Bell added: "The bill should make it clear that different political or cultural beliefs, sexual orientation or drug or alcohol use do not themselves constitute mental disorder."

Protests thwart 'dwarf-tossing' event

A controversial "dwarf-tossing" event, due to be held in Manchester, has been cancelled following protests from campaigners.

The event, which would have involved people of restricted growth wearing protective clothing and being thrown through the air, was due to take place at The Printworks venue in the city on 9 June.

David Pain, chair of the Restricted Growth Association, said dwarf-tossing was a "barbaric activity".

He said: "I cannot believe that in a modern-day civil society people with a disability can be allowed to be humiliated and abused in such a public manner."

"I have always considered Manchester to be a very rich and diverse artistic and cultural

city, and am disappointed that such a great city will demean itself by hosting the dwarf-throwing event."

Event organisers *The Sunday Sport* newspaper said the idea came after the England cricket team's poor performance in the Ashes and Cricket World Cup, when they discovered that England held the dwarf-tossing "world record".

It said it only cancelled the

event after it couldn't find an alternative venue, saying that Manchester City Council had "put pressure" on The Printworks.

Paul Carter, editor of *The Sunday Sport*, said: "Like everything, whenever you organise something contentious you will get some people who are unhappy. We don't live in a puritanical society and if we did we wouldn't do it."

Disabled people 'treated as second-class citizens'

Disabled people are treated as second-class citizens, according to the results of a new survey of 1,500 people, conducted by Scope.

Of those questioned, 85 per cent think that society treats disabled people as inferior, while over half of Britons say they have witnessed or experienced prejudice.

A quarter of men polled said they would have reservations about having a boss with cerebral palsy, or would simply prefer not to have one.

Jon Sparkes, chief executive of Scope, said the research showed that such prejudice is "not a myth".

He said: "In this day and age we would not condone sexism or racism in the workplace or in any social situation; so we cannot, and should not, be allowing disablism to continue."

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Government inquiry on healthcare inequality

BY DN REPORTERS

The Department of Health (DH) has announced an independent inquiry into healthcare for people with learning difficulties, following a damning report by the charity Mencap.

The inquiry will attempt to "learn lessons" from the six premature deaths highlighted by Mencap's *Death By Indifference* report in March, that found that people with learning difficulties are less likely to receive the healthcare they need than non-disabled people.

The Health Service Ombudsman for England will also be conducting an independent investigation into each of the six individual cases identified in the report, including that of Mark Cannon (right).

Dame Jo Williams, Mencap's chief executive, said: "Mencap and the families of those who died want the inquiry to investigate why the six people in the



report died and whether their deaths could have been avoided. Lessons must be learnt and urgent action taken to tackle the institutional discrimination that currently exists with the NHS."

In September 2006, the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) completed an 18-month long investigation into inequalities

experienced by people with learning difficulties and mental health problems in GP and other primary care services. It found that they were more likely to experience illnesses, develop them younger and die from them sooner.

The DH inquiry will "take into account" evidence and findings from that investigation.

Bert Massie, DRC chairman, said: "The evidence and recommendations we made last September are the correct starting point for the independent inquiry panel to begin its work."

Sir Jonathan Michael, who will chair the inquiry, said: "I look forward to working with both service-users and providers to examine current practice and recent experience, highlight what lessons the NHS could learn and to identify where practice should be improved."

In a separate move, the DRC gave a cautious welcome to a report from the British Medical Association urging doctors to remove barriers and improve healthcare for disabled people.

The report, which was commissioned in response to the DRC investigation, recommended data collection on the health and access needs of disabled people and better training for doctors.

Residential home shut down

An NHS care home has been closed by the courts, just two months after it was threatened with prosecution by the government's care watchdog.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) successfully applied to magistrates for an emergency closure order in respect of 4 Beech Close, which was run by Bedfordshire and Luton Mental Health and

Social Care NHS Partnership Trust (BLPT).

CSCI announced in March (DN May, pg 6) that standards in nearly all the care homes run by the trust fell "well short of national minimum standards".

CSCI said it was concerned that the welfare of the residents at the home was not being properly safeguarded, that

BLPT had not addressed the concerns raised by the commission in its last inspection, and said that "this could not be allowed to continue".

All residents at the home have been found alternative accommodation.

Deborah Kitson, director of anti-abuse charity the Ann Craft Trust, welcomed the decision to close the home.

She said: "One hopes that BLPT take the opportunity to look closely at their other services and do not assume that this is an isolated problem."

BLPT said it "regretted" the short notice closure, but welcomed the fact that "more appropriate" places had been found for former residents.

In brief

2012 film pulled

An animated video used to launch the controversial London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics logo was withdrawn after people with epilepsy experienced seizures after watching it on the official website.

Epilepsy Action received "numerous reports" of people having seizures after watching a five-second section of the video, showing a diver jumping into a pool.

The charity said the footage failed to meet safety guidelines.

London 2012 has withdrawn the video from its website and is conducting a review.

Alzheimer's cases to rise

The number of people with Alzheimer's disease is set to quadruple worldwide by 2050, according to research* published last month.

Researchers at John Hopkins University in Baltimore used a computer programme to predict a global rise in the number of cases to 106 million people.

Of these, it is thought 43 per cent will require the kind of high-level care received in nursing homes.

*Forecasting the global burden of Alzheimer's disease; visit www.jhsph.edu

Digital campaign call

Ofcom called for a campaign to ensure disabled and older people are not negatively affected by the switchover to digital TV, which will take place across the UK between 2008 and 2012.

Research by Ofcom's advisory committee showed disabled and older people were generally unconcerned by the switchover.

But it highlighted the importance of educating older and disabled people's support networks.

Patients locked away

Patients with dementia in Scotland are spending years confined to nursing care wards, a report* by the Mental Welfare Commission revealed.

Of 29 patient records examined, nine had not left the ward since admission.

Standards of care were found to be inconsistent, with problems including a lack of stimulating activities.

The report also calls for changes to the environment, such as providing clear signs and better information.

*Older and wiser; for a copy, tel: 0131 222 6111 or visit www.mwscot.org.uk

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Police watchdog finds man faced discrimination

BY KATHARINE QUARMBY

The independent police watchdog has concluded a wide-ranging investigation triggered by a disabled man's allegations over his arrest.

Jonathan Lea, from Birmingham, who is tetraplegic, had claimed he was wrongfully arrested, was subjected to undue force and that his human rights were infringed during his detention last May, when he intervened after observing the stop and search of two young men.

The Independent Police

Complaints Commission (IPCC) found that Mr Lea was discriminated against when he was arrested.

West Midlands Police was criticised for the way in which officers handled Mr Lea, the inappropriate way in which he was transported and for the fact that the police station was not adapted for wheelchair use.

John Crawley, an IPCC commissioner, commented that "because of the force's failure to make appropriate provision for disabled detainees Mr Lea was discriminated against –

that is, he was treated differently and to his detriment because of his disability and the force had no adequate reason or justification for so doing".

Mr Lea's other complaints were not upheld. Mr Crawley said: "I want to emphasise that we have not upheld any of the more graphic allegations Mr Lea made about the conduct of individual officers."

An IPCC spokeswoman added that the commissioner would "monitor the actions of West Midlands Police following our recommendations". She

said disability-related complaints were rare.

In a statement, West Midlands Police announced that they were in the process of identifying "what initial action can be taken to address the recommendations while at the same time considering our longer-term approach".

The Disability Rights Commission welcomed the IPCC's ruling and pointed to a recent survey it carried out which found that "almost a quarter of disabled people say they have difficulty using police services".

Poor disabled access leaves Welsh voters out in the cold

Nearly three-quarters of polling stations in Wales are still not fully accessible to disabled voters, according to new research* by Scope Cymru.

The survey, carried out during the National Assembly for Wales elections in May, found that although accessibility had improved since the last survey in 2003, there were still barriers.

Less than half of polling stations provided large-print ballot papers for visually-impaired voters, and just over two-thirds had a low-level polling booth for wheelchair-users.

The research also showed that a fifth of disabled voters would prefer to vote via an internet, telephone or text service.

Sharon Collins, executive director of operational services for Scope Cymru, said: "It is unacceptable that in the 21st century there are still nearly a third of polling stations where disabled people can't even get in the building. One person who has to vote in the street is one too many.

"Denying access means denying disabled people their democratic right to vote."

*Polls Apart Cymru 2007; for a copy, tel: 02920 662 406 or visit www.pollsapartcymru.org.uk



Snap happy: Stephen Faber's photograph of his friend Adrian was a gold award winner in Mencap's annual Snap! competition, which showcases photos and stories by and of people with learning difficulties. Some of the best are on show at London's Victoria and Albert Museum until 22 July.

Investing in disabled people's skills will pay off, says think-tank

A report by an influential think-tank has found that improving the skills of disabled people to world class levels by 2020 would boost economic growth by £35bn over 30 years.

The Social Market Foundation (SMF) report on disability and employment, produced in association with the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), says that such a strategy would also tackle child poverty.

The report proposes a national commitment to reducing the skills gap between disabled people and the rest of the population, forcing employers to take far more responsibility in employing disabled people and giving those who are unemployed more help to improve their skills.

Agnes Fletcher, director of policy and communications at the DRC, said: "As this report shows, investing in disabled people's skills is a win/win situation for the economy and delivering greater equality at the same time."

John Hutton, the work and pensions secretary, welcomed the report and announced a

pilot project, Employ Ability, which will encourage employers to recruit and retain more disabled workers.

Mr Hutton said: "I believe we need to go further in getting employers themselves to do more in supporting both recruitment and retention of disabled people."

The pilot, which will start in

the autumn, will go nationwide next year.

Disabled people remain far less likely to be in work, are half as likely as non-disabled people to have a degree and are twice as likely to have no qualifications at all.

*Disability, Skills and Work; £5; for a copy, tel: 020 722 27060 or visit www.smf.co.uk



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More support for disabled witnesses

A scheme which uses intermediaries to make the criminal justice process more accessible to disabled witnesses is to be rolled out across England and Wales, the government has announced.

The intermediaries help "vulnerable" witnesses by explaining questions and answers to them and assisting them in giving their "best evidence".

The announcement follows the success of regional pilots, which have supported about 700 witnesses. These have indicated that the scheme has improved victim and witness satisfaction and increased public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Justice minister Gerry Sutcliffe said: "It is vitally important that people feel confident in coming forward and that they should receive the necessary support to do so."



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Husband jailed for wife's murder

A man who was found guilty of murder for helping his disabled wife to kill herself will serve a minimum of three years in jail, after receiving a life sentence.

Liverpool Crown Court was told that Frank Lund, 58, from Wallasey, Merseyside, suffocated his wife, Patricia, last September. Mr Lund claimed she begged him to help her to die.

Dame Jane Campbell, campaign convener of Not Dead

Yet UK, said: "It was obviously a pretty difficult decision for the judge to take. I believe it was the right one. We cannot go around killing our relatives just because we think that their lives are not worth living."

Liz Sayce, chief executive of the disability charity Radar, said: "The murder of a person who is disabled or who has a long-term health condition must never be regarded as a mercy killing."

Bid to rethink strategy for carers

BY DN REPORTERS

The government has launched a "national debate" on caring* in a bid to improve life for the country's six million carers.

The initiative, welcomed by the charity Carers UK, was announced last month during National Carers Week by care services minister Ivan Lewis, who said: "We want a new deal for carers which is shaped by the views and real life experiences of carers."

The shadow minister for disabled people, Jeremy Hunt, had led an opposition day debate two days earlier in which he called on the government to reduce the amount of bureaucracy faced by carers.

Mr Hunt told a parliamentary debate that carers have to answer 769 questions to obtain the five different benefits to which they may be entitled and that 80 per cent of the questions were duplicated elsewhere.

He said: "Councils throughout the country would like to reduce the bureaucracy of the assessment process but legislation requires much of the assessing, thus making reduction difficult."

Replying to the debate, Mr Lewis said the government had introduced the first national strategy for carers, had provided an extra £25million for short-term respite care and was funding a new national helpline for those

in need of advice.

Other MPs drew attention to Britain's 175,000 young carers and the need for carers to be able to work flexibly.

Meanwhile, Carers UK has issued a report** that shows nearly three-quarters of carers are worse off financially since they started caring, and nearly a third have to cut back on heating or food.

The report calls for a full review of incomes and services for carers and their families.

Carer's allowance, the main benefit for carers, is worth £48.65 per week for providing a minimum 35 hours of care.

*www.newdealforcarers.org

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Fireman Simon: Simon Hawkins, the first amputee firefighter in Europe, has won the service delivery individual award at the 2007 Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Awards.

Following a motorcycle accident in 2004, Simon, a firefighter with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, with over 10 years' experience, lost the lower part of his left leg. He returned to active duty after going through a process of rehabilitation, a programme of reasonable adjustments, and a series of rigorous assessment tests. The awards were presented by fire minister Angela Smith.

Mental health tests for war veterans

Veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and the Falklands will now qualify for a mental health assessment, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has announced.

The MoD's medical assessment programme (MAP) was set up 14 years ago to help veterans who sustained psychological injuries during the first Gulf War, offering them examinations and clinical tests and recommending treatment.

It has already been extended to cover service personnel who have served in the current conflict in Iraq.

Robert Marsh, a spokesman for Combat Stress, a mental welfare charity for ex-service personnel, part-funded by the MoD, said the announcement was a "significant advance".

"This is a strong signal of support for veterans and veterans' issues and we are very pleased that the MoD has extended this assessment programme."

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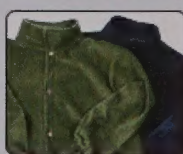
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Disabled asylum-seeker appeals in discrimination case

The High Court is considering whether a disabled asylum-seeker from Kenya can stay in Britain to prepare a case under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) against the Home Office and the company which runs Harmondsworth Detention Centre.

Peter Gitau Gichura, a wheelchair-user, is awaiting removal to Kenya by the Home Office. He was held in Harmondsworth Detention Centre in February and August 2006.

He claims that bathroom facilities were inaccessible, that he received inadequate medical treatment and that he was subjected to "painful and threatening" body searches.



Peter Gichura (front, centre) outside court in May

Mr Gichura's case will be heard in the Court of Appeal, which will rule on whether disabled people had any protection in prisons and detention centres under the DDA before December 2006 and the introduction of the disability equality duty (DED).

The DED is meant to ensure that all public authorities pay "due regard" to the promotion of equality for disabled people in every area of their work.

Unions ballot on Remploy action

BY IVY BROADHEAD

Unions representing Remploy workers are due to ballot their members on possible industrial action, following the company's proposals to close 32 of its 83 factories and merge another 11 with nearby sites.

As DN went to press, officials from the two main Remploy unions, GMB and Unite, were due to meet to decide when the ballot will take place. The ballot could result in a strike or other industrial action, such as a ban on overtime.

Meanwhile, a string of disability organisations, including RADAR, RNID and Scope, have backed the Remploy proposals.

RADAR chief executive Liz Sayce told MPs last month:

"There are people whose lives have been restricted by assumptions that they should be in a supported environment."

But a spokeswoman for the T&G section of Unite condemned the closures and called on the trade union movement to fight the plans.

She said: "The sheer scale of the closures and the impact it will have on disabled workers is both shocking and unprecedented."

Remploy worker Les Woodward, a representative of the Remploy Trade Union Consortium, said: "Remploy and its allies and the government have basically declared war on the unions and disabled workers."

A Remploy spokeswoman said any threat of industrial

action would be "premature", as the proposals were still at the consultation stage.

"The threat of industrial action will have a detrimental effect on our customers, who we rely on like any other business."

"It would put at risk those businesses that we plan to continue and put even more jobs at risk," she said.

Remploy says it costs £20,000 to subsidise each disabled factory employee, and this could be used to support four people in mainstream jobs.

Remploy workers have been picketing the Labour deputy leadership hustings taking place around the country, in protest against the closures.

See comment, pg 21, and letters, pg 18

Taxi offers easy ride

A new, more accessible model of taxi could make drivers more likely to pick up disabled passengers.

The new E7 taxi (right) features a pull-out ramp, wider doors, and more floor space and headroom for wheelchair access. Wheelchair-users can choose to face forward while travelling.

Other optional access features include an induction loop for people with hearing impairments.

Donald Pow, general manager of Allied Vehicles, parent

company of Cab Direct, which manufactures the E7 in partnership with Peugeot, said it would make journeys "more convenient, quicker, and definitely safer" for wheelchair-users.

He said: "To a taxi operator, a disabled passenger is more work, so the easier you make it, the better."

Raymond Harland, project manager of the Edinburgh-



based Democracy, Disability and Society campaigning group, added: "They're built with accessibility in mind. Not just wheelchair-users, but deaf people, even non-disabled people will find it really practical to use."

Disabled children from BME families live in unsuitable homes

Disabled children from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities are being put at risk by overcrowded, damp, or otherwise unsuitable housing, a new report* has shown.

According to the summary of research, produced by the Race Equality Foundation (REF), access barriers are less of a problem than the size and condition of homes, with cold, damp housing posing a health risk to children with certain physical impairments.

A third of BME families with disabled children have at least three problems with their homes, compared with a fifth of white families with disabled children.

The REF is now calling for the government to address the poverty at the root of many of the housing problems.

It is also calling for service providers to keep BME families informed about housing services available to them.

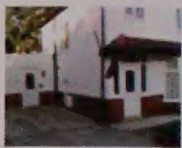
A REF spokeswoman said: "The services are not doing what's necessary to make sure [BME] families get access to services. They should be building trust and relationships between BME families and professionals."

*The housing needs of black and minority ethnic disabled children and their families; for a copy, tel: 020 7619 6220 or visit www.reu.org.uk

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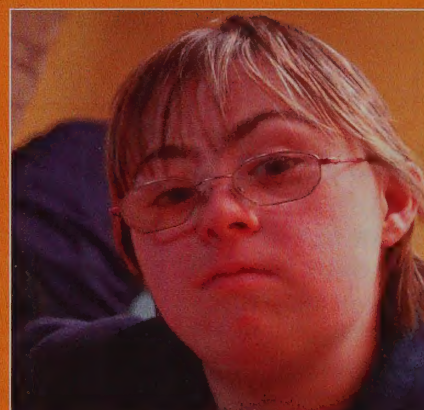
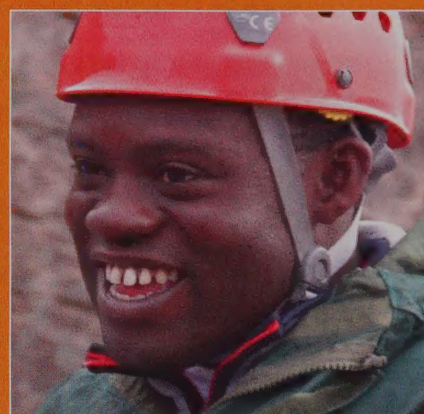
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For clearly written, useful and easy-to-find information all in one place, just go to www.direct.gov.uk/disability

Directgov

Public services all in one place

Bus that blocked three bays 'won't happen again'

DN CAMPAIGN



A bus was left parked across three disabled parking bays for five days at a motorway service station, to the frustration of a string of disabled visitors.

Barry Howes visited the Welcome Break services on the M40 motorway southbound at Warwick in May, only to find the coach – which was promoting Welcome Break – taking up half of the six parking bays provided for disabled people with blue badges.

Mr Howes, of High Wycombe, said: "It would have been a problem for anyone with mobility problems. It's quite evident that the management could not care about their disabled customers."



Anne Yates, from Poole, was forced to park away from the entrance when she visited the services with her partner, who is a wheelchair-user, because all of the unobstructed blue badge spaces were taken.

She said: "It's symptomatic of the attitude to disabled people."

A Welcome Break spokesman said the coach driver had parked in the disabled bays while waiting for another space to become free. The coach had then broken down, and could not be moved until five days later.

He said: "It shouldn't have happened. It was a one-off, and Welcome Break is committed to offering the best facilities for people with disabilities.

"All we can do is apologise and say it won't happen again."

MP in disabled bay row says 'sorry'

DN CAMPAIGN



BY SUNIL PECK

A Conservative MP has sparked a row after complaining that there were too many disabled parking bays outside a railway station in his constituency.

Anthony Steen, MP for Totnes in South Devon, was fined for leaving his car in a disabled parking bay outside a railway station.

He then told a newspaper: "The number of disabled bays is disproportionate to the number of handicapped people living in the area. I support making the life of every handicapped person easier, but we

should not discriminate against the able-bodied."

After hearing of his comments, the Disability Rights Commission wrote to the Conservative leader David Cameron, stating that the MP had contravened party policy to improve parking facilities for disabled people.

Jeremy Hunt, Conservative shadow minister for disabled people, said: "The Conservative Party recognised that the biggest single issue cited by disabled people as a barrier to independent living is an accessible transport system and that not being able to find a disabled parking bay is a huge cause of frustration for many disabled people seeking to perform everyday

tasks such as shopping or visiting the doctor."

He added: "I was extremely disappointed that the incident involving Mr Steen occurred and the Conservative Party does not in any way condone what happened."

Mr Steen told DN his comments had been "taken totally out of context so that they make me look like an absolute swine, and they imply that I am riding roughshod over the needs of the less fortunate".

He added: "I apologised for parking in an unused disabled bay. I should not have done that, end of story. But the question that follows is, why aren't they being more fully used?"

Parents of disabled children face poverty

Families with disabled children or disabled parents are 50 per cent more likely to be in debt than those without disabled members, according to a new report*.

The report, published in May by the children's charity Barnardo's, says that families with disabled children are also 50 per cent less likely to be able to afford holidays, new clothes, school trips or "treats" for their children.

And the report says that parents in families affected by disability are less likely to work and that those who do work are likely to be

on low incomes.

The report also notes that benefits increases have not reflected the extra costs of raising a disabled child, which it says is three times as much as a non-disabled child.

Recommendations include an adequate minimum income that recognises the real costs for families with a disabled child, as well as extra help with childcare costs by increasing the childcare element of the working tax credit for such families.

The report also recommends better family support services, including respite care

and short breaks.

Steve Broach, campaign manager for the campaign Every Disabled Child Matters, said: "We agree that the challenge is to help families into work but to also address the additional costs of disability.

"Like Barnardo's, we think there needs to be specific action targeted at disabled children if government is to meet its 2010 and 2020 child poverty targets."

*It Doesn't Happen Here; for a copy, tel: 020 8550 8822 or visit www.barnardos.org.uk

**See Poverty Files, page 17

Minister asks unions to help with job schemes

A government minister has asked trade unions to offer services to help disabled people back into work.

Jim Murphy, minister for employment and welfare reform, told the TUC's disability conference he wanted unions to expand their roles into providing back to work advice for people on incapacity benefit.

He said: "I want to explore whether unions can contract with government to support those on benefit [to] get back into sustained employment."

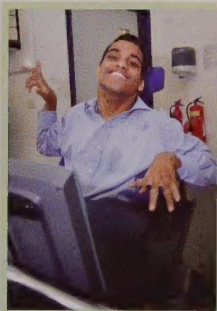
CORRECTION

In last month's *News focus* on the inquiry into the NHS contaminated blood scandal, we switched the photographs of Richard Waring and Gareth Lewis, due to a production error. We apologise for the mistake.

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Obituary: John Campbell

John Campbell spanned the worlds of AIDS activism and disability rights. Last year, he was nominated as one of the "mothers and fathers of the movement" in DN's Influence List (DN, August 2006).

John worked as a child prostitute and contracted HIV by his late teens. His activism started with Frontliners. He co-organised the first Walk for Life and helped to set up Positive Youth and the deaf organisation Aids Ahead. He set up the UK Coalition of People Living with HIV and AIDS in 1993, the first big AIDS charity run by people with the disease themselves.

I met John on a discussion programme on euthanasia and worked with him in the mid-1990s on the Rights Now! campaign, which led to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

He wanted people with HIV to be part of the mainstream disability rights movement and

was very proud of being chair, in the late 1990s, of the British Council of Disabled People.

John also worked to ensure that people with HIV were covered by the DDA and could access disability benefits.

He was a government adviser on HIV and sexual health in prisons and created the Back to Work project, a precursor to the New Deals. For the UN, he helped to empower people living with HIV in the former Soviet republics.

Even in recent years, when his health was poor and he was in and out of hospital, John remained politically active and full of fun. He could bitch for



Britain and combined high camp hauteur with humour, to marvellously entertaining effect. He died peacefully at home, will be much missed but leaves a lasting legacy.

Agnes Fletcher

Private landlords ignore DDA rules

Private landlords are unaware of their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), government research* has shown.

A report published by the Department for Work and Pensions in May found private landlords had very low awareness of disability legislation, including the new duties for landlords under the DDA.

But local authorities and housing associations had a good awareness of the legislation, it found.

Private landlords thought the DDA rarely applied to them even though, under the DDA, all landlords must make adjustments to policies, practices and procedures that discriminate against disabled people – such as providing tenancy agreements in alternative formats.

Although there is no obliga-

tion for private landlords to pay for major adjustments to physical features, they cannot refuse reasonable adjustments within the property that are funded by the tenant.

But private landlords do have an obligation to pay for smaller physical adjustments, such as accessible door handles or taps.

Prior to 2006, it had already been illegal for a landlord to refuse to let a flat to someone on the grounds of their impairment.

A National Federation of Residential Landlords spokeswoman said it was planning to publish guidance on the duties of landlords under the DDA in the next edition of its newsletter.

*Landlords' responses to the Disability Discrimination Act; for a copy, tel: 020 79628557, or visit www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5

Oversimplifying disability benefits could backfire

Oversimplifying disability benefits could have a negative impact on how they are administered, a government benefits expert has warned.

Bill Farrell, quality improvement manager for the Disability and Carers Service, told an inquiry into benefits

simplification by the work and pensions select committee, that simplifying legislation underpinning disability living allowance (DLA) and attendance allowance (AA) could "make life easier", but would threaten the amount of judgement, discretion, training

and support involved in delivering them.

Mr Farrell said: "DLA and AA are designed to be specific and Parliament have asked us to target the benefit in specific areas. If you made it much simpler you would lose the purpose for which

they were conceived."

When pressed by committee member Anne Begg MP on the 40 per cent rate of appeals on benefits decisions which are successful, Mr Farrell claimed that the "vast majority" of those were because "something new came up", such as a new

piece of evidence, and that the number of appeals had decreased.

He said improvements included better claim forms, additional staff training and guidance, target checking, improved evidence taking and keeping the customer informed.

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MP demands subtitles on free DVDs

Promotional DVDs sent out free with newspapers should be subtitled, according to the shadow minister for disabled people, Jeremy Hunt.

Mr Hunt has tabled an early day motion on the subject, echoing calls from the RNID.

Mr Hunt said: "It is in newspapers' own self-interest to make their DVDs appeal to this large and growing audience, which has significant spending power."

RNID chief executive Dr John Low said: "Television subtitles are indispensable to 1.4 million deaf and hard of hearing people.

"Newspaper companies often spend millions on promotional DVDs to boost sales – yet subtitling, which costs just a few hundred pounds, is often forgotten."



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BRENT ADOPTING LIFE

Remote control healthcare

BY SUNIL PECK

Installing electronic monitoring devices in the homes of people with long-term health conditions will help them lead more independent lives, according to the Department of Health (DoH).

Under a telehealth system, people with conditions such as heart disease or diabetes will be given monitoring devices. Users can also test their blood glucose levels or blood pressure.

Telecare sensors keep an elec-

tronic eye on people at risk of having an epileptic seizure or a fall and can switch on lights or raise an alarm if a person does not return to bed in the night.

Both systems are linked to health professionals and the local GP's surgery, where they are monitored.

Health secretary Patricia Hewitt said: "Remote devices mean greater choice and independence for patients, with more people able to monitor and look after their own health."

Penny Mordaunt, director of strategy, policy and partnerships at Diabetes UK, said: "As 95 per cent of diabetes management is self-care, this interesting new initiative could be an additional way to help people with diabetes keep their condition under control."

She added: "This new technology might also give people with diabetes an additional opportunity to have regular access to healthcare professionals, which would work in con-

junction with their usual face-to-face meetings with their healthcare team."

Primary care trusts (PCTs) in Kent, Cornwall and Newham have been awarded funding to look at how best these services can be implemented and rolled out nationally.

The telecare and telehealth director in Newham, Charles Lowe, said the scheme was a step forward but warned that the sensors were not 100 per cent reliable.

Arthritis drugs hope

People with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) have been given a "lifeline" with a successful appeal against a decision to limit access to treatment for severe forms of the condition.

In November 2006, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued draft guidance preventing people from trying a second treatment using anti-TNF drugs if the first failed to improve their condition.

Now NICE has agreed to look at its decision again. The about-turn came after an umbrella group, the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA), launched an appeal.

An appeal panel announced that NICE's health technology appraisal committee had been "unreasonable" in deciding to deny a second anti-TNF treatment.

Neil Betteridge, chair of ARMA, said: "It is fantastic that people may now get a 'second bite of the cherry'. There are three drugs of this type, and obviously patients want to try the other two if the first does not work for them."

"The challenge now is to ensure that the evidence NICE considers in its reappraisal is reliable and comprehensive, with the individual's health and safety paramount."

Arthritis Care described the NICE decision as a "lifeline" to people with RA.

Gene study hope

A study into the genetics behind several common conditions will herald major advances in medical treatment, scientists say.

The Wellcome Trust study analysed DNA from the blood of 17,000 people and found new genetic variants of depression, Crohn's disease, coronary heart disease, hypertension, rheumatoid arthritis and type 1 and 2 diabetes.

Professor Peter Donnelly, chair of the consortium that carried out the study, who is based at the University of Oxford, said: "By identifying the genes underlying these conditions, our study should enable scientists to understand better how disease occurs, which people are most at risk and, in time, to produce more effective, more personalised treatments."

Among the most significant findings is a gene common to type 1 diabetes (*see right*) and Crohn's disease (*see right, below*).

Professor John Todd, from the University of Cambridge, who led the study into type 1 diabetes, said: "The [biological] pathways that lead to Crohn's disease are increasingly well understood and we hope that progress in treating Crohn's disease may give us clues on how to treat type 1 diabetes in the future."

Professor Nick Craddock, of Cardiff University, scientific advisor for the bipolar organisation MDF, said: "By helping to unravel the mechanisms of illness, the findings will help pave the way to better diagnosis and treatment."



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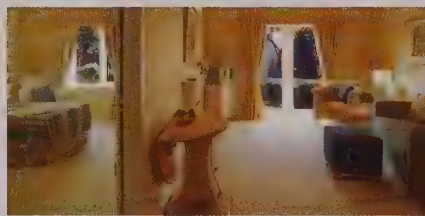
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NICE backs shared risk

The NHS drugs watchdog has endorsed a scheme under which the NHS would only pay for an expensive bone marrow cancer treatment if patients respond well to it.

The draft recommendation from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) follows an evaluation of a refund scheme put forward by the manufacturer of the drug Velcade.

A NICE spokesman told *DN* this was the first time it had recommended a "risk-sharing scheme", where a drug company refunds the NHS if a treatment is unsuccessful, and could pave the way for other treatments to be made available on a similar basis.

He said: "If manufacturers propose such a scheme, then we would consider it."

NICE expects to issue final guidance on Velcade this October.

Mentors to help Paralympic talents



Clockwise from top left: Libby Clegg with Dame Tanni and Sir Steve Redgrave; Natasha Baker; John McFall; and Helen Freeman

Four disabled sportspeople have been selected in a team of 16 promising talents to be mentored by Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson and Sir Steve Redgrave.

Wheelchair basketball player Helen Freeman, equestrian Natasha Baker and athletes Libby Clegg and John McFall have all been chosen to be part of Team Visa, designed to help them prepare for the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

As well as gaining experience and advice from the mentors, the scheme also provides the athletes with financial support for training and travelling.

Dame Tanni said: "I'm pleased that Visa recognises the importance of disability sport, by asking for a quarter of team members to compete in Paralympic events."

She said her role would be to offer advice and support to the athletes, as well as being a "shoulder to cry on".

"It's not about being part of their day-to-day coaching, but maybe being able to give them that extra few per cent that can make all the difference," she said.

The 16-strong team is split into two groups – eight "hopefuls" who are regarded as realistic contenders for the 2008 games, and eight "apprentices", who have the potential to compete in 2012 in London.

As well as receiving guidance from the mentors, each apprentice has also been "buddied" with a hopeful to provide extra support and guidance.

Clegg, who won two bronze medals at the Paralympic World Cup in Manchester in May, said it was an honour to be picked for the team, and hoped to get "lots of good advice" from the mentors.

Baker said: "When I got the email telling me I'd been chosen I just said 'oh wow!' It's great to get a chance to talk to Tanni and Steve and be able to learn from them."

Sir Steve, who himself has diabetes, said: "The Olympic Games have dominated my adult life and I will be doing everything I can to help these men and women achieve their own dreams of Olympic and Paralympic success."



The Great Britain wheelchair rugby team has won gold at the European Championships in Finland, and in doing so secured their qualification for the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing.

The team (pictured above, against Finland) were unbeaten throughout the tournament, and overcame a strong challenge from Germany in the final on 9 June with a 28-26 victory.

The win completed a hat-trick of European title victories, adding to wins in both the 2003 and 2005 competitions.

Jean Collingwood, chief executive of Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby, said: "The 12-man squad proved GB are

tough competition and succeeded in maintaining their dominance in Europe.

"The guys train and work hard 24/7, 52 weeks a year, and nothing gets in the way of competition success."

She added that the team would now be working hard to better their result in Athens in 2004, where they finished just outside the medals, in fourth.

"Our next mission is to do well in Beijing – now we have qualified – but London 2012 is also high on our agenda, with a strong vision of being a centrepiece in all the excitement and winning gold in front of a home crowd."



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Will money be enough for disabled

Ed Balls MP had just delivered a speech on childcare when he was buttonholed by Brian Lamb, a leading campaigner for better services for disabled children and their families.

Lamb, chair of the Special Educational Consortium (SEC), told him the government needed to do a lot more to help disabled children. Balls agreed to meet some disabled children and their families in his own constituency to see for himself the issues they were grappling with.

He visited Kingsland School in Stanley, Yorkshire, a primary school for children with severe learning difficulties.

"One of the big problems they told me about," he would say later, "was the lack of reliable short breaks or respite care, particularly during the summer holidays."

Eighteen months on, and Balls (pictured in March at the launch of a pilot initiative to enhance wheelchair services for disabled children) has announced the publication of a joint report by the Treasury and the Department for Education and Skills into how to improve the life chances of disabled children.

The Treasury is to invest £340 million in improving services for disabled children and their families in England.

Announcing the government's plans in May, Balls said: "This government's long-term goal is to transform the chances of disabled children and their families.

"This can't be done overnight – there is no magic wand to wave. But today's report makes a very significant step forward to meeting that goal, and will make a real difference over the coming years."

The Every Disabled Child Matters (EDCM) campaign – a coalition of Lamb's SEC, Contact a Family, the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) and Mencap – has been pushing for such an improvement in the provision of services and support, and for disabled children and their families to help shape the planning, commissioning and delivery of those services.

EDCM's campaign manager, Steve Broach, describes the package as "hugely significant". He says: "It is the first time that disabled children and their families have ever been a priority for



The government has been praised for investing £340 million in improving services for disabled children and their families. But does the cash injection go far enough? Sunil Peck investigates

government spending."

But Broach says the new funds are "certainly not the end of the story". He views the initial victory as a significant step to securing an improvement in the provision of support for disabled children and their families, but adds: "This money is not going to be enough to totally sort out services and make sure that every family gets the support that it needs."

'It is the first time that disabled children and their families have ever been a priority for government spending'

"We need disabled children to be a priority in the next spending review and the one after that, so that we can really deliver a 10-year programme of change."

Lamb says there also needs to be a cultural change in the way commissioners plan the services they provide.

"The major challenge is to make sure that local authority services join up and present a more coherent and consistent face to parents and disabled people. We want to see joining up happen. We want to see more piloting of individual budgets [where individuals are given money to

choose and buy their own services], we want to see better transition services [from childhood to adulthood]. To do that, you have to join up services to make it happen."

As part of the government's plans, it will set minimum standards for services, which Lamb says should help bring about change.

But not everybody is quite so enthusiastic about the new report.

Richard Reiser, director of Disability Equality in Education, who chairs Equality 2025's young person's committee, is concerned about the new national indicators, which will act as a barometer of how well services are meeting the needs of disabled children.

He says the government should have included the educational achievements of disabled children in the indicators.

Reiser also thinks the substantial sum allocated to what is essentially respite care, is misplaced.

"Parents would not need to be away from their children if they were supported in their homes," he says.

Reiser also says that "there is a lot about parents, but nothing about empowerment for young disabled people" in the report.

But he says the ministers present at the launch of the government's review "seem quite open to being lobbied on other issues".

He will now be campaigning for every local authority to have a worker responsible for empowering young disabled people. He would also like to see forums set up to give young disabled people a voice at a national level.

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) also insists that educational achievement should be included in the national indicators.

NDCS chief executive Susan Daniels says: "Deaf children have been under-achieving in school for generations.

"The only way to prove inclusion has worked is by measuring what deaf children actually achieve at school."

'There is a lot about parents, but nothing about empowerment for young disabled people in the report'

"This is the biggest opportunity for a generation to really measure how well the government is doing by deaf children. The government must urgently re-think its approach and act to include educational

achievement in the national indicator."

But Brian Lamb remains optimistic. He says the support of Ed Balls, a close ally of the next prime minister, Gordon Brown, will prove to be crucial for future generations of disabled children.

Lamb, who is also communications director at RNID, says his 2005 meeting with Balls turned out to be "crucial" in the campaign for more support for families with disabled children, but was "frankly a piece of luck".

He "nobbled" the MP before he was appointed economic secretary to the Treasury last year. "The fact that he went to the Treasury, and the fact that he is one of Gordon Brown's advisers, meant that we had somebody right at the heart of government who had been convinced of the case to make change happen.

"He has been brilliant in supporting the needs of disabled children. When you are in that position, there are 10 or 20 lobby groups coming to you with proposals, and politically he could have taken any of those. I think that the fact that Ed chose to put his energies into this area means that he has a genuine commitment."

ed children?

'Transition starts too late'



Miro Griffiths says the transition services designed to ease his transition to adulthood have been disorganised and unsatisfactory.

He had his first transition meeting just three weeks before his 18th birthday in May and is going to university in September.

But he thinks the process – which involved meeting social workers to discuss his future – should have started a year earlier, while he was deciding

whether to go to university.

"I think a prerequisite to transition to adulthood is that young people should be informed about what it is and what is at stake," he says. "Otherwise they are merely passive observers of what appears to be an assessment."

Miro says the process should begin much earlier, which would enable young people to make more informed decisions about whether to enter further education or find a job.

'It is a chance for you to shape services'

Anna Walker (pictured with daughter Susie-Jo) helped to set up a forum for parents of disabled children in Cornwall. It has around 250 members, but membership is increasing.

She says the forum has given parents the opportunity to influence decision-makers at a local level.

"A lot of service-providers come up with ideas that are around money or resources or things that have worked in the past. Often parents want something different to what

parents wanted 10 years ago. It's about ensuring that services develop to meet the changing needs of disabled children and families."

She thinks service-providers can be reluctant to work together, but the forum has succeeded in uniting them and co-ordinating their resources.

"You can get the message across that you are the expert and that you know the needs of your child and family. Only you can say what is



going to make a difference for you and your family, so it is an opportunity for you to shape services to meet that need better."

'It would be a dream to have a short break'



Deborah Packenham says it would be "a dream" to have a short break once a month or so.

Her nine-year-old son, Ieuan

Packenham-Behan, who has autism, sleeps for only four hours every night.

"He will be asleep for an hour, and then he will be awake for a couple of hours, and then go back [to sleep] again," says Deborah.

Ieuan's sleep patterns leave her feeling "permanently exhausted".

Her 13-year-old daughter also finds it hard to get a good night's sleep because Ieuan can be "noisy and lively" when he

wakes up, and she often feels "low and demoralised" because all her mother's attention is focused on Ieuan.

Deborah feels 'guilty' that her daughter's needs are being neglected. She would love to take her to the cinema or the shops or to a museum, or even for a short holiday.

"It is not that I want [Ieuan] to go away, but I really do think that the whole family would benefit if we had a small break every now and then."

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A disabled Prime Minister?

As Gordon Brown finally gets the top job in Westminster, Sunil Peck looks back at the key events that have shaped his life and career, including the rugby accident that left him partially-sighted, and asks whether his impairment will have any influence on his policies

Last August, *DN* named Gordon Brown as the UK's most influential disabled person. Now, less than a year later, he is about to enter 10 Downing Street as Prime Minister.

But how much do we know about Gordon Brown? And will his first-hand experience of disability – he is visually-impaired and his son has cystic fibrosis – push disability issues further up the political agenda?

A keen rugby player, Brown became partially-sighted at the age of 16 after he was kicked in the head during a match. He had three operations to try and save the vision in his left eye, and would later recall in an interview in *The Guardian*: "After each operation I'd have to lie in darkness for three maybe four weeks at a time."

A university friend told *Channel 4 News*: "His time in hospital – I think it made him more reflective, maybe made him more impatient as well."

Brown himself would tell *The Guardian*: "One door closes, you can't play rugby any more, so you concentrate on other things."

Then, while playing tennis one day, he noticed that the



Gordon Brown pictured with 11-year-old wheelchair-user Storme Toolis, who told the Chancellor to put more money into wheelchair services and physiotherapy at a Downing Street reception in 2004

sight in his right eye was deteriorating. But doctors were able to use a new surgical technique to prevent him from losing his sight completely.

After a fast-track education, he attended Edinburgh University at the age of 16. He immersed himself in student politics and became only the second student to be elected as

the university's rector.

He went on to work as a politics lecturer and a television journalist before entering parliament in 1983 and being appointed to the shadow cabinet in 1987.

Like David Blunkett, Brown rarely speaks about his sight loss or the impact it has on his work. In fact, he has said he does not regard himself as disabled. Responding to the news that he had been voted the UK's most influential disabled person in *DN*'s poll last year, his office said he was "a bit surprised to be nominated because he's never really considered his eyesight to be a disability".

This may explain why his office has turned down interview requests from *DN*.

Lord (Colin) Low, who has a visual impairment himself, suspects that Brown has not made more of his disability because it is not in his nature to make excuses or appeal for the "sympathy vote".

But Lord Low concedes that Brown's failure to talk about his impairment in public may have fuelled "negative publicity" from people who have criticised him for his awkward body language.

Sir Bert Massie, chairman of the Disability Rights Commission, says that "one of the great changes over the last 20 years is the ability of politicians to admit their sexuality without believing it will cost them their seats".

"Maybe disability has not quite got to the point of

disability pride in the way that gay pride has yet. Or it could simply be that people like Gordon believe that it is an irrelevance."

Some senior civil servants and ex-cabinet colleagues have portrayed Brown as someone who treats others with contempt.

But Anne Begg, the disabled Labour MP for Aberdeen South, disagrees with the media image of Brown as a "dour Scotsman". She bumps into him in parliament regularly and finds him "approachable" and "friendly".

Sir Bert agrees that Brown has an unfair reputation for dourness. "He smiles very easily, he is very open and has got a pretty good sense of humour. You can't go around with a grin on your face the whole time."

Begg describes Brown as a "heavyweight politician who is passionate about football".

In fact, he has been a big fan of Raith Rovers since he was 10 years old. In an interview with the football magazine *Four Four Two*, Brown said: "I used to sell programmes outside the ground with my older brother. We'd sell them before the match and at half-time we'd get in free."

Brown has edited and written books on the Labour Party, but his latest book, *Courage: Eight Portraits*, looks at some of his heroes, including Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. He is a voracious reader too, and is said to love

Ian Rankin's Edinburgh-based Inspector Rebus books.

Life peer Dame Jane Campbell is not convinced that Brown's experience of disability will influence his policies. "I am sure direct experience as a partially-sighted man and having a child with cystic fibrosis must have some impression on his world view. Having said that, if we look at the record of disabled MPs in the House of Commons, they have not exactly been eager to display liberation disability politics, and whether they have any is pretty questionable."

"In the Upper House, there are a number of disabled people who are actively pursuing the disability agenda: Baroness Wilkins, Baroness Chapman, Lord Low and Lord Ashley are but a few of the many disabled people who have pushed the rights agenda forward. Wouldn't it be good if Gordon Brown took his cue from them?"

Sir Bert is cautiously optimistic. "We have had disabled kings before," he says. "We have undoubtedly had disabled Prime Ministers before, but what would be good is if there was an open acceptance that we had a Prime Minister with an impairment. But what is important is not the label that we add on to somebody. What is much more important is whether he chooses policies which serve our cause."

WHO IS HE?

Gordon Brown has been Chancellor of the Exchequer since May 1997. He was set to become Prime Minister as *DN* went to press. He has been Labour MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath since 2005 and was previously MP for Dunfermline East from 1983 to 2005.

He was educated at Kirkcaldy High School and Edinburgh University, where he gained a first class honours degree in history and a doctorate.

He lectured at Edinburgh University and at Caledonian University before working for Scottish TV.

He is married with two sons.

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DN's motoring correspondent, Helen Smith (centre), checks out how the new blue badge inspection powers are being used in the heart of Cambridge

Cambridge blues on show



(Anti-clockwise, from top) Parking attendant Pete checks out a correctly displayed blue badge; a ticket is issued as this blue badge is obscured; and Pete asks the driver to move his lorry off the pavement



A couple of months ago, I investigated whether local authorities were using their new blue badge inspection powers (DN, May, page 36). These powers allow traffic wardens and parking attendants to inspect blue badges, and to check that they are not stolen or being displayed by someone who is not entitled to use them.

To see how these powers are being used, I spent the morning with a parking attendant on the streets of Cambridge.

9.30am

I meet Pete and Cambridge disability rights campaigner Gerri Bird (pictured top, left) outside Cambridge City Hall. Pete is a parking attendant rather than a traffic warden. He works for Legion Parking, which is contracted by Cambridge City Council to manage the city's parking. Legion Parking is a trading part of the British Legion, so any profits from parking tickets go to the charity. Pete patrols a small area of Cambridge that includes a large number of on-street disabled spaces.

Our first road is Peas Hill. One car with a blue badge is parked in a disabled bay. Pete checks the badge is in date and displayed correctly.

9.45am

As we make our way down Benet Street, Gerri and I find our path blocked by a lorry that has parked on double yellow lines to unload. Pete asks the driver to move and tells him to take more care in future not to block the pavement because it makes it very difficult for wheelchair-users.

10am

Kings Parade includes loading bays, disabled bays and no parking areas, so there is plenty here for Pete to inspect. When he comes to a disabled bay, he spots the driver inside, so asks to check his badge. Pete notes down the serial number, expiry date and issuing authority and checks the photo on the back. The badge he inspects raises no alarm bells, but the data he collects is still sent to the local authority that issued it.

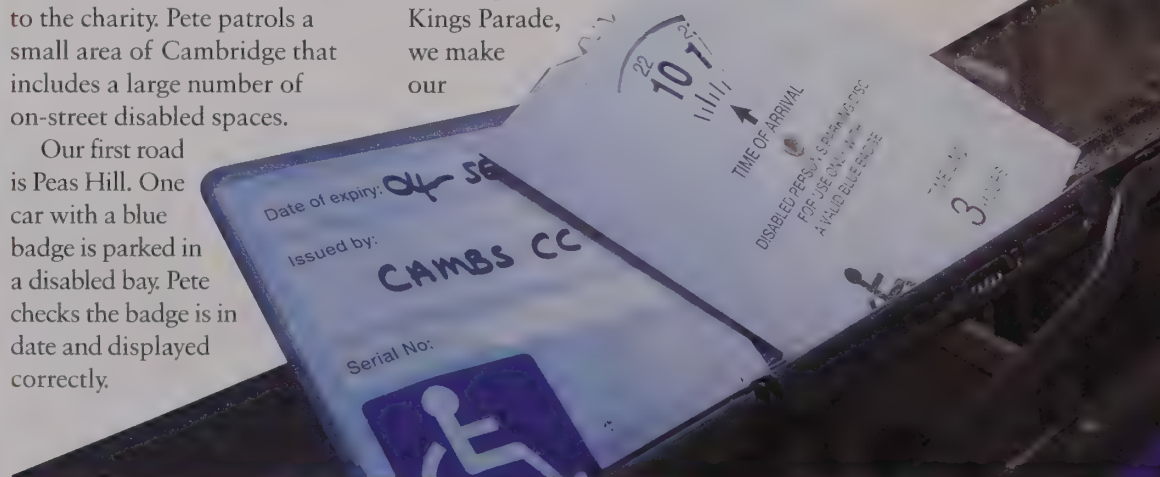
10.30am

After checking all the badges in Kings Parade, we make our

way down Roundchurch Street. Lo and behold, we find a lorry parked in a disabled bay. Gerri tells me that she often finds this space taken by a lorry because it's convenient for local businesses. However, this is the only disabled space in the area so it is essential that it is available for disabled badge holders. Pete issues the lorry with a £60 parking ticket. Just as we are leaving, the lorry driver comes back. Not surprisingly, he isn't too happy!

10.45am

Cambridge city centre is pedestrian-only between 10am and 4pm. As we move down Jesus Lane, we see a lorry parked on the pavement, and it has already been issued with a ticket. The driver of the lorry assumes it was Pete who had given the ticket. Pete explains he shouldn't be parked there because it is after 10am but as he hadn't issued the ticket he can't discuss it.



**11.15am**

Our final road of the morning is St Andrews Street. This is a street with a taxi rank, a bus stop, loading bays and disabled bays. Pete explains that part of the problem here is that everyone tends to park in the wrong bays, which can cause chaos. We then see evidence of just this problem. A taxi has parked in the loading bay, so the lorry has to park in the bus stop. Pete asks them both to park in the right place.

Pete spots a red sports car in a disabled bay, with two people inside and no badge on display. Pete taps on the window to ask if they have a badge. They haven't and drive off at speed.

Pete then sees an older lady in a car with a blue disabled badge on display. He checks her badge using the new inspection powers and confirms that the badge is hers. However, he also explains to her that she should not be waiting in the car because badges are for people, not vehicles. Her relative has popped to the bank, using her passenger's blue badge as a convenient reason to park in a disabled bay. No ticket is issued but he gives her a booklet explaining how to use the badge correctly.

While Pete is talking to her, Gerri and I spot a disabled badge incorrectly displayed. It

has been put out so the time clock covers the expiry date. It could have been an innocent mistake or a deliberate attempt to obscure an invalid badge. The car is given a ticket. If it was a legitimate mistake, the driver can appeal, but if not they will have to pay the fine.

Pete then spots another couple in a disabled bay and asks to inspect their badge. The badge belongs to the passenger. But just as we move on to another vehicle, the driver gets out, leaving the passenger behind. Again Pete gives them a leaflet, explaining that if the badge holder is not getting out of the vehicle they should not be parking in a disabled bay.

Noon

This was the end of our busy morning. I have seen the new enforcement powers used three times, two parking tickets issued and lots of vehicles asked to move. Everyone asked was happy to show their badge and I think pleased that at last something is being done to help combat fraud.

It has been "a typical day", says Pete. "The new inspection powers have made a good impression with the public overall.

"Many of the public who have been checked have said they are glad it is being carried out as



Fine day: Pete issues a £60 fine for parking in a disabled bay – the driver wasn't too happy

they are aware that some blue badges are abused," he says.

A Cambridge City Council spokesman adds: "We are determined to make Cambridge more accessible to disabled visitors. The authority to inspect blue badges on street is a useful tool in making sure that valid blue badge holders are aware of the correct method in which to display their blue badge, aware of the parking benefits available to

them and above all making sure that the spaces provided for valid blue badge users are being used appropriately."

He says the results of the inspections will be passed to social services at Cambridgeshire County Council. They will write to the owner of any blue badge that has been used inappropriately.

The results will also be passed to Cambridgeshire police, especially in cases where

the blue badge has been used fraudulently.

Gerri Bird says: "Many disabled people in Cambridge are happy that Cambridge City Council has taken note of the problems with blue badge abuse.

"Now the new inspection powers are in place, many disabled city residents feel that this will make people think more before abusing the system."

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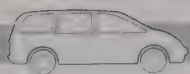


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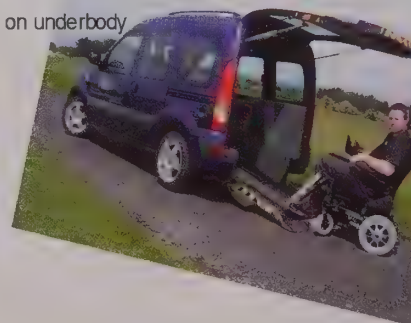
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Noelle and Richard Emmerson have set up a car-hire firm aimed at disabled people, and business is good, says Noelle

I was given MS as a 21st birthday present and, of course, I have treasured its secrets ever since, rising to its frequent challenges now for over 24 years.

Over the years I have gone from driving my old Morris 1000 Traveller to now being driven in my Renault Kangoo by anyone over the age of 25. I have gone through the whole process of trading in a manual car for an automatic on the Motability scheme and then moving to driving with hand controls and finally accepting that it was safer for me and for others to be driven around.

One common theme over this time has been the lack of provision between owning a car and being without one. Even when I bought my first car with hand controls, there was nowhere to test-drive it, so it really was a shot in the dark. As for having a courtesy car when mine was off the road, that was just an impossibility.

More recently, since being totally in need of having a wheelchair-accessible car, we noticed that when going on holiday to Europe there certainly is no provision.

This led me to think about what visitors to the UK did if they needed specialist vehicles.

The more we thought about what was available, the more we realised that there was nothing available for daily rentals at all.

When I say we or us, I am talking about myself and my husband, Richard. He only takes a little encouragement to come up with what I call his “harebrained schemes”. But this time I don’t think it is so harebrained as it will bring great freedom to many people.

Richard and our nephew, James, run the adapted car-hire company Richard set up with my encouragement. I also have an (unpaid) advisory role – selecting the vehicles and adaptations, and testing any vehicles before we buy them.

Even in the short time since Adapted Car Hire (ACH)* started trading in April, it is clear that many people have been in need of a car-hire service to suit their needs or those of friends and family.

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Business so far has been good, and the wheelchair-accessible vehicles have been so popular that we have already had to order new vehicles to meet the demand.

Some of the reasons and



Richard Emmerson with nephew James and adapted cars for hire

stories behind the rentals so far have been uplifting. People are going out for the first time in years, families living apart are being reunited and some people are being given a final chance in life to enjoy something different.

The other aspect to this is the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which now places a duty on service providers to provide the same service to their disabled customers as they do to their other customers. Unfortunately, I am sure it will still be a while before other motoring-related organisations such as insurance companies, garages that sell cars, car repairers and so on start to face up to their responsibilities under the DDA.

It will be up to disabled customers to demand their

rights, but at least they can now provide a potential solution for those companies by telling them about ACH.

I hope ACH will give people in my position the chance to regain some independence and give their friends and families an opportunity to include them in activities from which they have been excluded.

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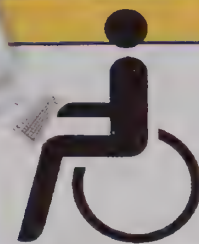
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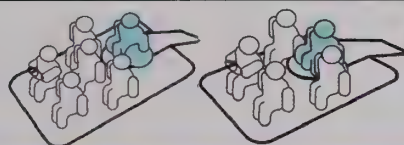


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Six years on from the launch of the Baywatch campaign, abuse is still rife. Now it's time for another survey and we need your help, says *DN's* acting editor, John Pring

The following year,

As Douglas Campbell, then DDA executive director, said:

So, two years on, the members of the Baywatch campaign – BPF, DN and Mobilise (formed last year from a merger between DDA and DDMC) – have decided it is time for another survey.

DN 3100 Mary Wilkinson said: "The good index and results show that parking abuse can be stopped, it does exist. Those who are taking time to exercise Bowwatch will keep up the pressure."

We want you to complete the form on the page opposite for one of the Big Four

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Renault Kangoo 1.5 Diesel	PN05 EXJ	White	3 Seats, Ramp	7,650	9,995
Renault Kangoo 1.6 Petrol Auto	RK53 DCX	Mt Blue	3 Seats, Ramp	6,000	9,295
Renault Master 2.5 Diesel Versa	PJ52 FXS	Green	5 Seats, Tail Lift	24,000	11,595
Renault Master 2.5 Diesel Versa	PF06 EKE	Silver	5 Seats, Tail Lift, Air Con	2,437	16,995
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E & OE

2007 Baywatch Survey



23rd to 29th July 2007

Please help the Baywatch campaign to monitor supermarket progress towards improving parking facilities for disabled motorists.

Baywatch is partnered by Time to Get Equal, the human rights campaign for the UK's 10 million disabled people.



Please complete this form for one of the 'big four' (Asda, Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Tesco), or for some other supermarket carpark. It should be based on a visit, preferably at a busy time, during the week commencing **Monday, 23rd July**.

Return your filled-in form to the freepost address below by **Wednesday, 8th August**, or fill it in online at www.disabilitynow.org.uk www.mobilise.info or www.britishpolio.org.uk

1. Please record your name, email address, home address, and phone number (leave blank if you would prefer not to give your details)

9. If there was abuse of bays did you mention it to staff/manager?

10. If so, how would you describe their response? (please circle)

Excellent Good Fair Poor Very Poor

Please use the space below for any comments

2. Name of store (please circle)

Asda Morrisons Sainsbury's Tesco Other

3. Specific address of location (and name if you circled 'other')

4. How many spaces are there in the carpark in total? (please circle)

1-100 101-200 More than 200

5. How many parking bays are provided for disabled customers?

6. How many vehicles were parked in those bays?

7. How many vehicles were parked in those bays without a blue badge?

8. How many of those bays were vacant?

Please return to Disability Now, FREEPOST LON19971, London N7 9BR

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From left to right: Camping at Kirchzell, Germany; in Guines, France; driving through Neunbrunnen in Austria; and Ommen, the Netherlands

The drive of his life

Shaun Bond (*below*) wanted to take his Motability MG roadster on an epic journey, so in May he set off on a 3,700 mile tour through Europe. This is his story...

I became eligible for the Motability contract-hire scheme three years ago and chose a convertible MG TF115 from the website.

I decided then that this car must one day be taken on an epic journey.

I was awarded a grant from the charity Ataxia UK and support from Eurocamp Independent to realise my dream – a four-week tour across Europe, completely independently and staying entirely at Eurocamp Independent campsites.

Week 1 – Gillingham-Prague England-France-Belgium-the Netherlands-Germany-Czech Republic

Drove 1,200 miles. Spent £500. I found camping to be highly enjoyable and rewarding. This is cost-effective and flexible – the campsites did not require prior booking and all met a good standard of hygiene and accessibility. I was given some “touring cheques” by Eurocamp Independent which pay for accommodation at a campsite for one night in low season. These cost £10.25. They also provide an invaluable travel pack and stickers. I needed to purchase breakdown cover and headlamp dimmer stickers.

The facilities at the Roos campsite in Ommen (near Amsterdam) were superb. The whole area is tailored for the needs of cycle-users and so is also good for wheelchairs. There is a meandering river,



level pathways, shops and a café. I would recommend this site as suitable for most disabled people. Also, people were very friendly and enthusiastic about my venture. Many of the larger sites are generally much more suitable for disabled people, having numerous facilities.

As for driving, my satellite-navigation system guided me throughout my journey, making navigation, and avoiding toll roads, simplicity itself. It is fairly rugged, with a touch-screen, and is also capable of acting as a telephone. It is also very easy to use, although the software screen is a little small. I would say that this is an essential item. I paid £175 for a

Tom-Tom Go 700 from eBay.

I found driving to be most pleasant. I am able to easily travel long distances without feeling very tired. I would generally travel for up to 300 miles per day, on non-motorway roads. My biggest fear was driving on the right, as I have never done this in Europe. This fear was soon allayed, though. I found that I immediately adapted to this with no trouble.

The car, too, seemed to love driving through Europe. You can drive much faster and there are few bumps and cameras to contend with. My only problem was a flat battery. I needed to call my breakdown service (not

provided under the Motability scheme) at the campsite in Ommen. This was my fault and was soon rectified.

One campsite in a beautiful German forest was not accessible. On the day of my departure, I had to disassemble the tent in torrential rain. This was my first taste of hardship.

Week 2 – Prague-Interlaken Czech Republic-Austria-Italy- Switzerland

Drove 1,000 miles. Spent £400. Triocamp Praha was on a slope, so I had to use crutches (I have a rare, progressive brain disease, cerebellar ataxia). This is tiring for me and I risk falling when doing so. I had to queue for the shower, and so gave up

trying. I was now exhausted, but was kept awake by a singer in the bar opposite.

I decided to leave the next morning. The drive southwards was stunning. I went through the Czech forests and lakes, crossing a Soviet-style checkpoint to arrive in a gorge in Austria. The driving was challenging and hair-raising, although incredibly rewarding. I drove through Roman tunnels and winding poppy-laden lanes. I passed teal and aqua-coloured lakes, gorges and alpine peaks. I cruised past Austrian snow drifts, to cross into Italy on a mountain-top. The road suddenly became very narrow and steep – not for the faint-hearted.

I generally found the cities I visited to be unsuitable for my needs. I loved Venice, for instance, but had to use sticks and was knocked into frequently by the hordes. I found the countryside and spectacular landscapes to be more suitable and enjoyable.

I camped at the Mediterraneo campsite in Treporti, Venice. It is set in a wooded, beachside area. It is completely accessible, with a private beach, pool complex and excellent restaurant. This was the best campsite I visited. Highly recommended – even for severely disabled people.

As for the different nationalities I encountered, I found Italian people to be warm-hearted, although many looked at me with pity. This was



Left and centre: Neunbrunnen. Right: Treporti, Venice



Left to right: Shaun's sat nav device; Austria; and mountains in Neunbrunnen, Austria

not the case in the Netherlands where attitudes were the most progressive. The French people I met seemed to have difficulty grasping the concept that I am becoming gradually wheelchair-dependant, and so use sticks and a chair.

I drove from Venice to Interlaken in Switzerland. On the way, I had to pay toll charges and make a substantial diversion, after encountering a blocked Swiss mountain road. This led to me arriving very late at a cold, dark pitch. It was also raining. Stupidly, I decided to erect my tent – and got wet doing so – as did all my equipment. I awoke in the night, shaking violently.

Week 3 – Interlaken-Frejus Switzerland-France

Drove 700 miles. Spent £300.
I continued southwards until the rain ceased. It did so by

early evening, when I was motoring through the Verdun region of France. I found a small campsite in the valley and decided to pitch there for the night. Dry and refreshed, I drove through the “grand canyon” area of Verdun gorge, in the hot sun, arriving at the campsite in Castellane. After a few days, I drove to Frejus, on the Mediterranean coast. It was hot and sunny there, with a lot of insects and sand. I loved the pool, though. I met a man who had lost his wife to cancer only two months ago. He was 73 years old and had been married for 42 years. I admired his courage and strength in simply continuing with his plans, despite great loss. I also met a couple holidaying in an adapted motorhome. She has MS and uses a wheelchair.

Week 4 – Frejus-Dorset France-England

Drove 800 miles. Spent £400.
I felt lethargic in my last week and in need of a more comfortable bed. The camping was better than I had predicted, though. In France, every campsite is obliged to provide a wheelchair-friendly bathroom. This means that most people can stay at any French campsite, for a night at least. I stayed in Les Rivages in Ebruil, central France. The site I visited was accessible, with bread delivered to your tent. This was a small, family-run site, which I would recommend.

I returned home through central France. I could not pitch up in Paris, due to torrential rain, sleeping

in the car instead on a route nationale near Amiens. This was surprisingly comfortable!

I ran out of funds the next day, just having enough money left to pay for fuel, so I took the ferry home.

I found the overall experience to be wonderful. An

independent wheelchair-user, just turning up without prior arrangement, seemed to be unknown across Europe.

I hope that my experience will encourage more people to do the same as I believe that travel and adventure is hugely beneficial.



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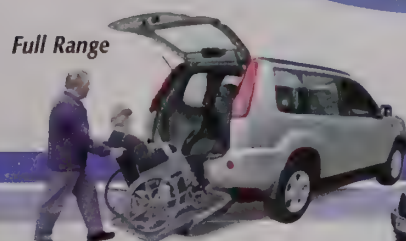
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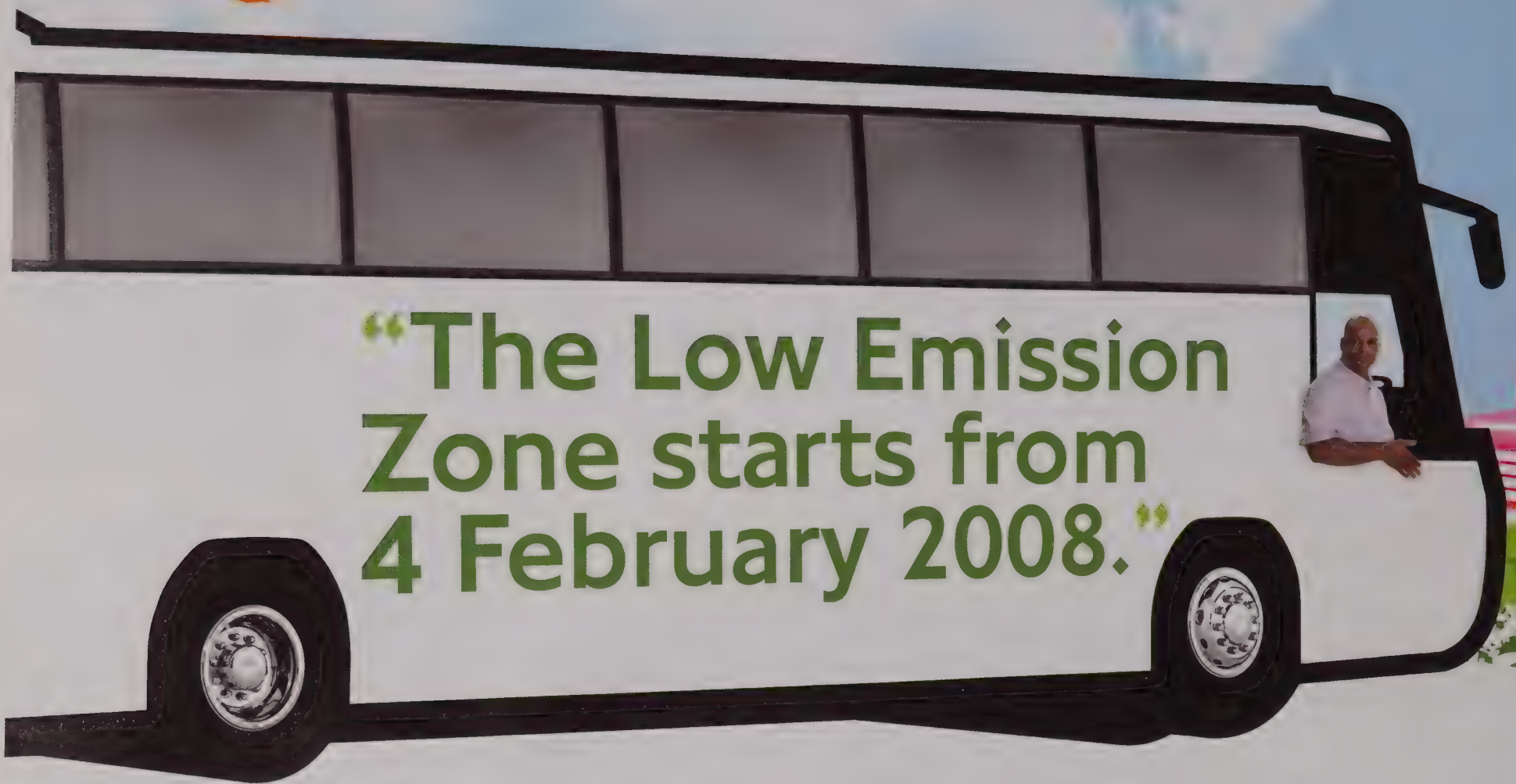
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The Greater London Low Emission Zone

This will be introduced from 4 February 2008 to help improve air quality in Greater London. It will be a phased launch starting with the most polluting diesel-engined lorries. Buses and coaches will be affected from July 2008 and diesel-engined minibuses (below 5 tonnes) are not affected until October 2010. The Low Emission Zone (LEZ) will not apply to cars, motorcycles or small vans (under 1.205 tonnes unladen weight). The LEZ is outlined by the red boundary line in the map opposite.

Your vehicle needs to meet the emissions standards shown in the table, which are based on European Standards. To work out if you're affected check the date of your vehicle's first registration as new on your vehicle registration document (V5C). Owners of GB-registered vehicles can use the vehicle compliance checker at tfl.gov.uk/lezlondon or call 0845 607 0009 to see if they are affected. All owners of non-GB-registered vehicles (including Northern Ireland) which meet the LEZ emissions standards will need to register their vehicles with Transport for London to drive in the LEZ without incurring any penalty charges.

What if I am affected?

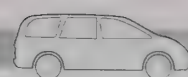
If you are affected, you have the following options:

- Reorganise your fleet so only vehicles which meet the new emissions standards travel within the zone.
- Modify your vehicle by fitting pollution abatement equipment to reduce particulate emissions. These must be independently certified devices and the vehicle must be inspected by VOSA, or a recognised certification authority, to check they have been fitted correctly.
- Upgrade your vehicle by purchasing a newer vehicle manufactured after the dates on the table.
- Pay the daily charge. Transport for London would prefer operators of affected vehicles to meet the emissions standards rather than pay a daily charge.

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Vehicle type
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Date
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plus the driver's seat
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Gross Vehicle Weight

July
2008
Euro III

January
2012
Euro IV

All Euro III vehicles meet the LEZ standard. Vehicles first registered as new on or after 1 October 2001 are assumed to be Euro III, so will meet the LEZ emissions standards.

From January 2012 the required emissions standards are raised to Euro IV. All Euro IV vehicles will meet the LEZ standard. Vehicles first registered as new on or after 1 October 2006 are assumed to be Euro IV, so will meet the LEZ emissions standards.

Minibuses.
Diesel-engined
passenger vehicles with
more than eight seats
plus the driver's seat
below 5 tonnes Gross
Vehicle Weight

October
2010
Euro III

All Euro III vehicles meet the LEZ standard. Vehicles first registered as new on or after 1 January 2002 are assumed to be Euro III, so will meet the LEZ emissions standards.

Vehicles not meeting the emissions standards could be made to do so through modification to meet the relevant Euro standard for particulate matter.

call 0845 607 0009
(local area) for more information.

Other lines may vary. International call rates apply.

Transport for London





PICTURES BY MARK DAVIDSON

How a Qpod made Margie cool

Margie Woodward treated herself to a new Qpod and discovered that this “extraordinary little car” allows her to enjoy the thrill of driving through the New Forest

I decided that I wanted a vehicle that would allow myself and my canine partner Renée to travel across open ground, particularly through the New Forest, where I am fortunate enough to live.

The hunt was on, so last year I went to the Mobility Roadshow and took a close look at what was available.

There was a variety of scooters. In particular, the Trampler – the electric, all-terrain buggy. But there would be no space inside a Trampler for Renée, who would have to run alongside. Then I came across the Qpod, which at first glance looks a bit like a boiled egg on wheels.

Rather than make a fool of myself at the show, I decided to investigate further at home, and possibly test-drive this extraordinary little car.

Reading the blurb on the website was a great help, as there are different makes and types of Qpod to suit different needs and activities.

The main UK distributor is the Qpod Motor Company*, which is based in Honiton, Devon, although there are

other dealers across the UK. I explained that I was a disabled driver and could drive any automatic car, with a few adaptations. They were very accommodating and saw no trouble in offering me a test-drive.

So off we went to Devon. As soon as I saw the Qpod, I was hooked. The controls are similar to a motorbike, with a twist throttle to the right, and the rest of the controls – lights, indicators, horn, and so on – on the left. There was a foot brake, and the gear-stick was very simple: up for reverse, down for forward. No problem!

Although small and compact, two adults can just about squeeze into it.

Test-driving the Qpod was so exhilarating, I decided I had to have one. At a cost of just under £5,000, it is cheaper than the Trampler, it runs on petrol and is licensed for use on the road.

There were some adaptations that I needed, including an extension to the seat to allow Renée, a labrador, a bit more space to sit down; a foot-operated dip-switch and

an extension to the indicators. We contacted a firm called Adaptacar** (which is Motability-accredited), in South Molton, Devon. They were extremely enthusiastic, as the owner Stuart already had his own Qpod and could see how easily adaptations could be made to allow disabled people to use a “fun” four-wheel-drive car.

‘Going through the forest is like being on horseback because you go with the bumps’

I had a towbar fitted to my car and drove down to Cornwall to collect my Qpod. It was the first time I have towed anything and I must admit that I was a bit apprehensive, but there was no problem at all. I just had to remember to leave extra space when approaching roundabouts.

Once I had brought my Qpod home, the next thing was to get Renée used to travelling in it. It wasn’t easy, because it is

quite noisy, but she soon learnt to trust what mummy said.

I also thought I’d better obtain permission from the Forestry Commission to take my Qpod into the enclosures and open forest.

Once this was done, we were free to enjoy the open countryside.

The first few trips took a bit of getting used to. We are still learning, but what fun!

The first time I sat in it, I was scared stupid. At 30mph, it’s very light on the steering. Once you get your confidence, heigh ho. Going through the forest is like being on horseback because you go with the bumps. Obviously, you have to pick your terrain: if you go in too many pot-holes, you’re likely to capsize. There is a knack to driving it, and you need to learn that knack. I dare say you could go on an off-road course to learn how to do it safely. But who wants to be safe all the time? A little excitement is good for the blood pressure!

It’s just so exhilarating because I’ve never been able to balance on a motorbike and it’s the same sort of feeling of

freedom. Although I drive a car – God knows how many miles I travel a year for Scope – it’s a totally different feeling being able to bomb across open land, which I wouldn’t normally be able to do for mobility reasons.

One young lad came up to me and said: “What is it?” When I explained, all he said was that it was “cool”. This is a first for me. I’ve never been cool in my life.

Now I am looking forward to a long, hot summer, when Renée and I will be able to explore places in the New Forest I wouldn’t be able to walk to.

So if you are visiting the New Forest this summer and you see a little yellow vehicle, with a woman behind the wheel and a dog in the passenger seat, you will know who it is.

Margie Woodward is empowerment officer at the disability charity Scope

*Tel: 08702 414804 or visit www.uniquemotorcompany.co.uk

**Tel: 01769 572785 or visit www.adaptacar.co.uk



Track suited: You have to pick your terrain carefully with the Qpod – it can handle muddy ground, but too many potholes could prove too much



Dog tired: Margie Woodward with canine partner Renée – the passenger seat in her new Qpod had to be extended to give Renée more room

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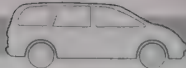
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Blueprint for a better badge

Long-awaited changes to the blue badge scheme could be in place in September, but more needs to be done to combat fraud. Paul Carter reports

Over a year has passed since *DN* last reported in-depth on the frustratingly slow progress of government reforms to England's blue badge scheme (*DN*, June 2006).

And it is now over eight years since the government's accessible transport advice body, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), began its review of the scheme, which culminated in 47 recommendations for improvements, back in October 2002.

The recommendations were aimed at overcoming problems such as widespread badge fraud and theft, abuse of blue badge spaces, and councils without proper databases of blue badge holders.

Later that year, the government published its response to the review, accepting some recommendations but pointing out the need for further research and consultations.

More than 12 months after our last report, there has been some progress.

Last autumn, the government introduced long-awaited powers to inspect blue badges for police officers, traffic wardens and parking attendants.

Helen Smith, director of pol-

icy and campaigns at Mobilise, and also *DN*'s motoring correspondent, has spent a morning with a parking attendant to watch the new powers being used (see *get in gear*, pages II-III) and concludes that disabled people seem pleased that something has been done to try to stamp out fraud and misuse.

But she says the government needs to do more to combat blue badge fraud. "The blue badge system has almost got out of control," she says. "It's something we definitely need to have and parking concessions are invaluable, but we need to stamp out the fraud."

The Department for Transport (DfT) is currently consulting on other proposed changes to the scheme.

At the end of March, the DfT published long-awaited draft regulations on the changes, which address some of DPTAC's recommendations.

These include extending the scheme to children under two who need to travel with bulky medical equipment. The extension was raised in *DN* by the Conservative leader David Cameron (*DN*, December 2006), who couldn't get a badge for his son Ivan, who has



epilepsy and cerebral palsy, until he was two years old.

A hologram will be added to the badge as a security measure, and the scheme will

now include people with severe congenital impairments in both arms.

And there will be a change in the length of time for which a

badge can be issued, effectively creating "temporary badges".

Presently, people in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance (DLA) automatically qualify for a badge for a fixed term of three years.

This means that those with shorter-term impairments can still use the badge after they have stopped receiving DLA, something the new rules should prevent.

The badge will also include the words: "Front – display this side up", to help prevent disabled people being fined for displaying their badge incorrectly.

The DfT hopes the changes will come into force in September, with changes phased in over three years as badges come up for renewal.

Despite these planned improvements, many of DPTAC's original recommendations remain outstanding.

In fact, it is so long since the original review that the government has announced another "comprehensive review" of the blue badge scheme to address "all wider issues" and DPTAC's remaining recommendations.

A report is due in September, with the publication of a "comprehensive blue badge strategy" by April 2008.

The review will also incorporate research into the introduction of a national blue badge database, the scrapping of exemptions from the scheme held by some central London boroughs and extending the scheme to other groups of disabled people.

Andy Kirby, secretary of DPTAC, says one improvement that would make a huge difference would be to introduce a national database, which would help clamp down on fraud and misuse.

One issue of "great sensitivity", he says, is the prospect of extending the scheme to other groups such as those with severe mental health problems or autism.

"If you make blue badges available to more people but you don't increase the number of spaces, then what does that actually achieve?" he says.

But he says DPTAC's members look forward to the government's recommendations.

"We hope this review will produce a clear picture of where we are going and hopefully that will nail the whole thing, because it has been a long time since our review..."

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Conquering the Conquest

DN's motoring correspondent Helen Smith wishes she had worn a helmet while testing this powerful trike

With its sleek design and glossy paintwork, The Conquest, designed by Martin Conquest*, is certainly an impressive sight. This trike can be driven from a manual wheelchair and is made from the front of a standard BMW R 1150 R motorbike, fitted into a frame with two rear alloy wheels.

Within minutes of being unloaded at Kilverstone mobility centre in Thetford, it had attracted a large crowd of admiring onlookers.

The Conquest is easy to get into. A ramp lowers and you pull yourself up onto it. The wheelchair then locks into place using the EZ lock wheelchair docking system. This system only works with a fixed frame wheelchair.

The Conquest was originally designed for people with lower body disabilities but Gary Rowlands, who demonstrated the trike, told me they've had a lot of interest from tetraplegics, so will be looking in the future to produce some with mouth controls.

The Conquest I was testing could only take a manual chair but a different version is wider and capable of taking a powerchair.

Martin Conquest recently introduced a version with a seat so that ambulant disabled people can ride it too. The Conquest I was trying had hand controls but I didn't have the dexterity to use them, so Gary controlled the trike from behind me. He just had to put up with my hair whiplashing him in the face.

Legally you don't have to wear a seatbelt or a helmet on the trike, although it is strongly recommended. Since I was just testing it, I didn't have either and I did feel very exposed. When we hit a bump I thought I was going to go flying over the handlebars, which of course I didn't. But once I'd got used to it, the "I'm terrified" feeling was soon replaced by "this is fantastic!". We didn't go faster than 40mph but the exhilaration I felt was amazing. You do feel totally free. I'm told the trike will go up to 105mph

but I think I'd like to be in leathers from head to toe, be strapped in and wear a helmet if I was going to go that fast.

In the UK, you can ride the Conquest with just a provisional car licence. If this is the case, you must display L-plates and you cannot carry a passenger. If you do have a full motorcycle or car licence, then you can carry a passenger and there is a seat designed for this purpose.

A Conquest costs from £21,495 but from last September it has been available on the Motability hire purchase scheme**.

On the day I was testing the Conquest, the weather

was fine but I expect I wouldn't have been quite so keen to take a ride if it was raining. There is a plastic cover you can put over yourself but I think on a freezing cold winter's day I'd rather be in my car!

Although I'm told some people have a Conquest as their sole means of transport, I see it as more of a toy for the weekend and a fantastic way to take a tour of Europe.

*Tel: 0161 351 0324 or visit www.martinconquest.com

**Tel: 0845 456 4566, textphone 0845 675 0009 or visit www.motability.co.uk

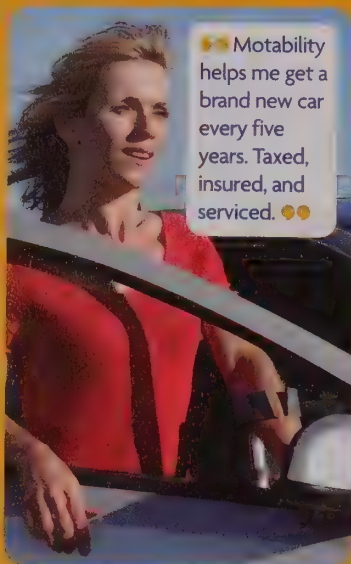


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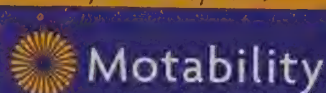


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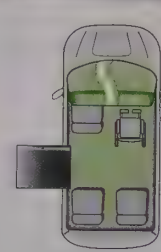
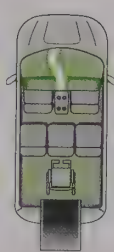
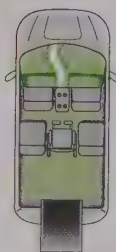
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ev-uh-loo-shuh n or, especially Brit., ee-vuh

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3. wav-evolution



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Kia delight

Strange name, but a pleasant drive. Mike Rogers tests the new Kia cee'd

February this year saw the introduction into the UK of the Kia cee'd hatchback.

Yes, that's how its name is spelt – the cee'd.

Makers seem to be enjoying giving new models strange names now; perhaps it makes a new model stand out, but I won't make a judgement on that.

Anyway, the cee'd is an enjoyable car to drive and outstanding for its claimed reliability – it is unique in coming with a seven-year or 100,000 mile warranty on the transmission scheme, with five years bumper to bumper (the whole car). Reliability is a vital asset to the disabled motorist, which only adds to the cee'd's

attraction when considering a purchase, and it confirms Kia's confidence in the build quality of their products.

The cee'd is designed for Europe – and in Europe, as it is built in Slovakia.

Prices start at under £11K, going up to £14K. The Motability advance payment for the 1.4 'L' entry model is £1K. It comes with a long enough wheelbase to ensure good rear seat leg-room and an adequately sized boot. It is offered straight from launch with a range of engines – petrol versions with either 1.4 (105 bhp) or 1.6 (122 bhp) and with diesel a 1.6 turbo or 2-litre model giving either 90 or 115 bhp output. An automatic version can come with the 1.6 petrol, and the 2.0 diesel has a six-speed manual gearbox.

The cee'd has independent rear suspension, which is generally unusual these days, and even the 'L' entry model sports air conditioning. There are also little curiosities

such as an air-cooled glove box. Why anyone would want cooled gloves, I don't know, but it sounds good for the sandwiches...

On top of all that, you get a rake-and-reach adjustable steering column (one that can be adjusted up and down as well as forwards and backwards) which can often be valuable for a disabled driver. The higher spec LS model

offers full climate control, electric rear door windows, front fog lights and half-leather upholstery.

Other nice standard touches include driver and front passenger active head restraints and full iPod compatibility, at no extra cost. Indeed, the cee'd throughout uses premium quality partners – Apple, Michelin and Bosch.

For Kia Motors UK, this is

the most important car they have launched, replacing the Cerato. They have confidence in competing with many cars in the "C" segment, such as the Focus, Golf, Astra, Megane and the Mazda3 and certainly my testing week threw up no criticisms of what's offered above.

Altogether, I found the cee'd user-friendly for the disabled motorist and can confidently recommend it.



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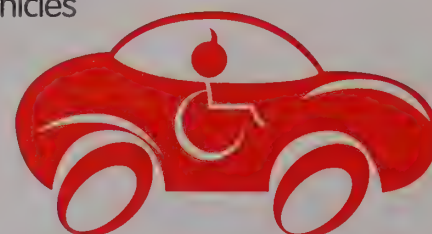
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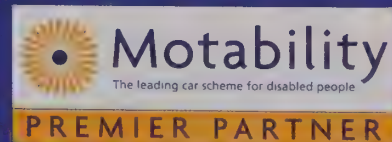


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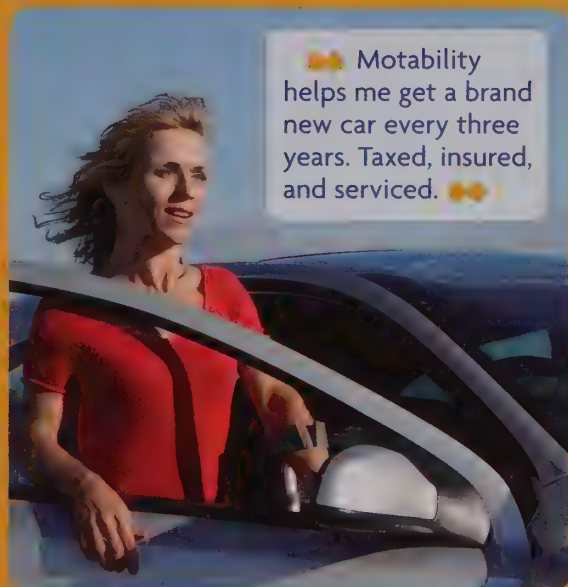
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This month, the annual Mobility Roadshow will showcase some of the newest and brightest mobility products. But what happened to some of the products launched at previous shows? Helen Smith investigates



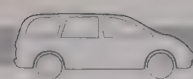
One company coming to the show for the first time is Morgan Independence, which has recently designed a trike

* Thursday-Saturday, 19-21 July, Kemble Airfield, Cirencester, Gloucestershire. Open 10am daily; free admission and parking; www.mobilityroadshow.co.uk



At the show in 2003, I was very taken with a product called Biz-spoke. Its idea was to make a guard (wheel insert) for self-propelled wheelchairs that can be printed with any design. However, its website no longer exists and I've been unable to find them on the internet, so it looks as if this idea didn't take off.

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2004

One of the most eye-catching exhibits in 2004 was the R1200C-T half trike half BMW exhibited by the company Grinnall. I remember sitting on the trike and having my photograph taken (*below, top*). Since the show, Grinnall has sold only about 10 bikes and although the show was not particularly good for short-term business, the company says it did help in the long run. Tel: 01299 822862 or visit www.grinnallcars.com

One company which regularly exhibits at the roadshow is London Recumbents. In 2004, the new model they had on display was a side-by-side (two seats next to each other) trike (*below, bottom*) from Denmark. Although it doesn't sell this particular model any more, it sells plenty of others. In 2004, the company had just been awarded Motability certification for cycles with power, which was the first time that motorised cycles had been made available through Motability. So far, though, London Recumbents says few people have bought bikes through the scheme.

The company was at Kemble last year and particularly liked it because of the good road access, camping on site and nearby wetlands park. It will be there again this year with two of its best-sellers – the Kettwiesel tricycle and the duet wheelchair tandem. Tel: 020 8299 6636 or visit www.londonrecumbents.com



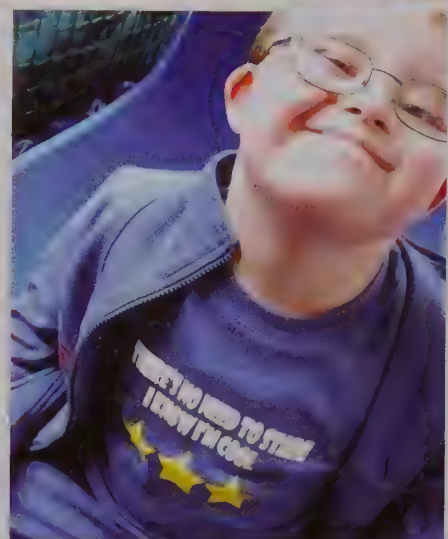
MARTIN JENKINSON



2005

One of the show highlights in 2005 was the launch of a performance bike that could be ridden from a wheelchair. It was made by Martin Conquest and based on the BMW R850R. The bike on show in 2005 (*above*) and also in 2006 was just a prototype/concept but the suggestions and comments from visitors to the show were taken into consideration and this year a production model called the Conquest 1200 will be available to test drive. Originally, the bike was designed for manual wheelchairs but now it can also take power chairs. www.martinconquest.com

If these bikes are a little out of your price range, you could have a chance of winning one. Martin Conquest has donated a Conquest 1200 to a Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) raffle, with the winning ticket to be drawn at the show. www.spinal.co.uk



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Your questions answered

Our panel of five leading motoring experts answer your questions on anything from easy-to-use seatbelt devices to car hoists, wheelchair-accessible vehicles and motor insurance

Which car?

I have spondylosis/spinal arthritis and have to lift my legs in and out of the car. I would like to know what car and which hand controls would suit me best. The steering also needs to be very light.
Mr Mills

EP: There is a lot to consider in your choice of car – for example, issues such as seat and sill height, door widths, and whether you need steering to be lightened beyond that offered by the manufacturer.

Assessors at your nearest mobility centre would be able to advise you on the most suitable vehicle and adaptation solution. For details of your nearest mobility centre, contact the Forum of Mobility Centres, tel: 0800 559 3636 or visit www.mobility-centres.org.uk. The forum is a network of 17 independent organisations covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which offer professional advice and assessment to individuals who have an impairment or are recovering from an injury that may affect their ability to drive, or get into or out of a vehicle. Some centres also offer assessment and advice with regard to wheelchair or scooter selection.

DB: In general, you should consider a vehicle with high, flat seats and good lumbar support. Information on vehicle measurements is available from Motability's *Vehicle Suitability Guide*, which can be viewed online at www.motability.co.uk or requested through the Motability customer helpline on 0845 456 4566.

Armed with this information, it is then vital that you should visit dealerships and try vehicles before making any decisions. The types of controls that can be fitted will depend somewhat on vehicle choice. It is important to be assessed for suitable controls, and this can be arranged through a mobility centre (see above).

Envoy wanted

I have been looking for an automatic wheelchair-accessible vehicle (WAV) that can be driven from my electric wheelchair and be fitted with hand controls suitable for a person who only has the use of her left hand. I have seen two cars advertised in DN, but one was for the driver only and



Vexel Quovis

upon further investigation I was informed it could not be fitted with hand controls, and the other was over £22,000, way out of my budget. I would like a small car that is automatic, can be fitted with the hand controls I would require and driven from my electric wheelchair, with the option of taking someone out with me – and one that is not so expensive that if I bought it I would have no money left to run it. I really value my independence, and having to rely on taxis and friends for lifts everywhere does rather compromise that.

I remember seeing an Elswick Envoy many years ago, but have not been able to get any information about them.
Sarah Taylor

EP: Sarah, I'm afraid that the Elswick Envoy started production in 1981 and lasted only a few years. It was based on an original design by William Towns that was launched in 1973 and spent a couple of years being touted as a new concept Mini – the Minissima – before eventually ending up as a “drive from wheelchair” vehicle. Even this was expensive, though, with a fully specified vehicle costing around £10,000 when it was launched. Perhaps the cheapest “drive from wheelchair” vehicle available is the Vexel Quovis (above). It is similar to the Smart car (though slower and noisier) and is normally a one-person vehicle, but some models have a passenger seat. To give you an idea of cost, it is available through the Motability scheme with an advance payment of £2,422. Further information is available from the converter, Brook Miller (tel: 01484 721 772 or visit www.brookmiller.co.uk).

An alternative is the Sirius Automotive converted Renault Kangoo 1.6 Expression automatic, which is available through the Motability scheme with an advance payment of £7,750. Grants may be available through the Motability scheme to help fund these vehicles.

DB: There are small automatic WAVs available as “drive from wheelchair” solutions, such as the Vexel Quovis and a variety of Renault Kangoo conversions. They can all have hand controls fitted, and the Kangoo conversions would allow you to carry a passenger.

If you are in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance or the war pensioners mobility supplement, Motability's contract-hire scheme may be a more cost-effective way of getting the vehicle for you. Contact our customer helpline for more information (tel: 0845 456 4566 or visit www.motability.co.uk).

Easy seatbelt

I have limited movement in my neck and shoulders, and I struggle getting my seatbelt on and off. I am looking for a device such as an extra attachment on the seatbelt to make this easier.
Rhoda Mathers

EP: The Klunk Klip, which is available from Care4Car (tel: 0845 225 2848 or visit www.care4car.com), may be a device that could assist you. It is designed to reduce tension in the seatbelt and prevent pressure build-up.

BR: Try using something like a folding reacher to access the seat belt. There are different sizes of reacher on the market.

Insurance problem

My mother-in-law has recently had to give up driving and is in the process of buying a mobility scooter. Although she has been driving for years, we are finding it difficult to get her insurance cover because she is 89 years old. The insurance companies we have tried will not insure persons over 80, which I find

quite bizarre.
Lesley Needle

HS: It is unclear if you are referring to car or wheelchair insurance. Policies for both are available, particularly from companies experienced in providing insurance to those with special requirements.

Do call Mobilise (tel: 01508 489449) for contact details. Unlike car insurance, there is currently no legal requirement for powered wheelchair/scooter insurance, although it is recommended.

Sliding system

Can you advise me where I can get information about a car seat system I have heard about where the wheelchair slides on and off the seat bracket?
Maureen Wishart

DB: There are several systems available that operate in a similar way, including: AutoAdapt Carony (tel: 0121 3335170 or visit www.autoadapt.co.uk); Baboulin Voyager (tel: 01376 564499 or visit www.techmobilityuk.com); Constables CarChair (tel: 01323 767574 or visit www.constablesmobility.com); and Elap Traveller (tel: 01254 871599 or visit www.elap.co.uk).

It is important that you try the systems to check their suitability for your personal circumstances.

Further information can be found from Ricability (tel: 020 7427 2460 or visit www.ricability.org.uk).

EP: The Carony 24 or 12 is designed for users who are able to propel the wheelchair themselves but can be available as an

attendant-propelled option. It is designed to eliminate lifting and simplifies transferring into and out of vehicles.

Bays should be bigger

Manufacturers don't think about the size of disabled bays when making their vehicles – many adapted vehicles are too big for accessible bays. The bays should be bigger, too. Adverts never show vehicles in disabled parking bays. Multi-storey car parks aren't high enough, so shopmobility schemes inside are hard to use. A recent government law states that the standard height should be 2.1m. I need 2.4m for my vehicle, without opening the top box, and space for my ramp.

At the moment I have to use two non-disabled bays and park far away from the entrance so I don't get complaints. Only one place across the country has big enough bays – Sheffield train station.
David Hughes

HS: I think the key word is “adapted”. The base vehicles are designed for a specific market, eg as sports utility vehicles or for commercial use or as multi-purpose vehicles and not with adaptations for disabled drivers.

The guidelines on the size of bays have been established for a number of years and maybe should be reviewed. However, in established car parks one would assume larger bays would mean fewer spaces.

On the question of entrance height, the Department for Transport (DfT) advice is clear: “The height and width restrictions on the entrance to multi-storey car parks exist for a purpose, which is to restrict the use of the carpark by large camper vans or heavy goods vehicles... Some disabled motorists use vans or high-top cars; others use cars with their wheelchair stowed on top of the vehicle, so height can be critical. It is recommended that the minimum vertical clearance, from carriageway to designated parking bays, should be 2.6m. This height is sufficient for a car carrying a wheelchair on its roof and for the wheelchair to be positioned vertically during the hoisting process.”

British Standard 8300 gives specific advice on this subject.
GW: I would suggest contact-



ing the manufacturer or the marketing department for the vehicle you wish to buy.

The height of multi-storey car parks is a problem that has been around for several years and encountered by drivers of larger vehicles and those motorists who have top boxes. Many of the recently built multi-storey car parks are built to a standard height of 2.1m, and in the case of older car parks the height restriction is much less.

Many designers of new multi-storey car parks do try and make provision for several parking spaces between the highway and the entry to the carpark to accommodate larger vehicles.

More than one carer

Why on the Motability scheme can you only have two drivers on the insurance (unless your care is 24 hour, and then all carers are covered)? I was unable to get a WAV on the scheme because I have six carers and it is not 24-hour care. This seems rather short-sighted. I had to get a hefty bank loan to get my WAV in the end.
Victoria Peggs

DB: It is true that the Motability scheme generally only allows two drivers. A third can be added at additional cost and it is possible to change drivers at any time just by phoning the scheme insurers. This maintains a balance between meeting most people's needs and containing the cost for everyone with a Motability car.

The scheme also makes allowances for customers who can't name regular drivers in this way. For example, someone who requires 24-hour care or who lives in a care home may have several carers who change regularly. To meet the needs of these customers, we can arrange for a car to be provided with insurance which allows for any of the carers to drive as required. Each case is considered on its merits, but in most instances a car can be provided. We will be happy to look into your situation again and help in any way that we can. Please contact our customer helpline (tel: 0845 456 4566).

Knee operation

I am having an operation on my right leg, which will mean I will not be able to bend it. I would like advice on what type of vehicle and what kind of adaptations I will need.
Mr Munro

DB: Internal access is going to be your prime concern. Three-door vehicles tend to have a

wider door opening to allow more room to get in. In some vehicles it is possible to have extended seat runners fitted, so that you can move the seat further backwards to make it easier to get into the vehicle. The Motability *Vehicle Suitability Guide* may help you to narrow your search (visit www.motability.co.uk). You should try potential vehicles as there is no substitute for actually seeing what suits you personally. With regards to a safe, suitable method to drive a vehicle, you should consider an assessment of your needs through your local mobility centre (tel: 0800 559 3636 or visit www.motability-centres.org.uk). Having ascertained what you need, it may be advisable to have a series of familiarisation lessons using the new controls.

EP: Assessors at your nearest mobility centre would be able to advise and recommend the best solution to your current problem (see above).

Scooter room

I have have been a member of Motability now for about 18 years and I am about to get my next new car for three years. Because my disability has changed, I now own two mobility scooters and want a vehicle that will accommodate either. I have also heard of a hoist/lift that will make it easier to get these in and out of my car. I have chosen a Ford C-Max because of the ease of getting in and out of the car and room for my scooters. But having talked to the dealer at Ford and the adaptation fitter about two types of hoists (120kg and 150kg), I am now unsure of what I need. Both scooters are over 120 (125 and 132kg). I have a Pride Legend Classic XL-8 and a Calypso four-wheel. The dealer spoke of the 120 being easier to use but I would have to remove the seat or maybe fold it down. Can you give me any advice on this?
Jude

EP: The Forum of Mobility Centres has a new arrangement with Motability where Motability customers who require advice on adaptations can be referred to their local mobility centre. This service is free and you need to contact Motability customer services (tel: 0845 456 4566) to enquire about eligibility for referral.

A word of warning about the capacity of the hoist you choose: I am not sure where you got the figures about the weight of your scooter, but some manufactures quote weights that don't include the batteries! If you are not sure what you need, it is worth getting independent professional advice.

Boot-size buggy

I drive a Smart Fortwo, which is ideal for me as I live in London, but now I am finding walking increasingly difficult (I have spinal arthritis and only 50 per cent use of my left arm). I am looking to buy a buggy to increase my mobility and access to galleries, etc. I need one that will fit into the boot, but will also be light enough for me to lift when it is taken apart. Or is there some sort of mechanical lift I can have fitted to do the job for me?
Elizabeth Sparke

EP: There are small scooters and powerchairs that are small enough to be stowed in the limited space offered by a Smart car; for example, Otto Bock manufactures a powerchair, the A200 (*below*), that is specifically marketed as being able to do this. However, even when dismantled, the parts, in particular the main frame and the battery pack, can be heavy. There are various types of hoist available but consideration needs to be given to the weight and size of the wheelchair or scooter as well as the vehicle you are fitting it to. As you will need to ensure that the scooter is right for you in terms of comfort, range and control and that it

can be stowed successfully in your car, I'd recommend that you arrange to have a demonstration of equipment and assessment of your needs at a forum-accredited mobility centre. Your nearest centre is the Queen Elizabeth's Foundation Mobility Centre at Carshalton, Surrey (020 8770 1151 or email info@mobility-qe.org).

DVLA registration

I have just bought a used mobility scooter that has a top speed of 6mph. It has variable speed control and is road capable. Does it need registering with DVLA? If so, does it need a tax disc?
Ron

HS: Because of the speed your scooter is capable of, it is classed as a Class 3 powered scooter. This means it must be registered with the DVLA for road use. Your scooter would be licensed in the exempt "disabled" taxation class and display a nil duty tax disc. There is still a lot of uncertainty over this and currently the number of scooter-users who have registered with the DVLA is still very small. At the moment, you don't need to have insurance but it is strongly recommended.

Ratings system

As I have progressive motor neurone disease, I have no strength in my neck and find the jolting in the back of our Motability Renault Kangoo intolerable for more than 20 minutes. I also have no view of the countryside. Ease of access for my carer is not perfect either. It would be very difficult for me to keep trying out lots of different vehicles, so a shortlist or ratings system might be a good idea. I feel that the Kangoo gets pushed because it is a cheap option. Many carers are elderly or have bad backs and the restraints are very poorly designed, requiring a lot of bending, but I think all WAVs have similar systems.
Judith Berrington

DB: Motability has worked closely with an organisation called Ricability to produce accessibility ratings for various car models. Plans are afoot to offer more detailed information about adaptations and wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAV) to support this, which I am sure you will find helpful. The information currently offered by Motability includes the *Vehicle Suitability Guide* and the *Price Guide*, containing key measurements for the WAVs available on the Motability scheme. This information is available online (visit www.motability.co.uk)

Expert panel



Helen Smith
Director of policy and campaigns, Mobilise



Don Brereton CB
Director of Motability



Ed Passant
Chief executive, Forum of Mobility Centres



Geoff Wilkinson
Council member, The Blue Badge Network



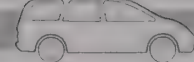
Bob Ross
Helpline manager for the Disabled Living Foundation

and can also be requested through the Motability customer helpline (tel: 0845 456 4566).

If you can ascertain your seated head height (from the ground to the top of your head whilst seated in your wheelchair), and your seated eyeline height (from the ground to your eye level whilst seated in your wheelchair), then this would help you use the guide information to identify possible alternatives, without having to try lots of vehicles. It is possible to have vehicles demonstrated to you at home. While it is subjective, some people perceive models fitted with air



Otto Bock powerchair



suspension offer improved ride quality, so it would be worthwhile taking a test drive in a vehicle fitted with this option. The wheelchair restraint systems are very similar in most WAVs. I would recommend you seek advice from a vehicle conversion specialist who will be able to discuss the alternatives that will meet your needs.

EP: You may find that the discomfort you experience is enhanced by the slope of the floor (some conversions offer a flat floor in the wheelchair compartment rather than a slope) or the position of your wheelchair (some conversions allow the passenger to sit alongside the driver – which would increase visibility). Similarly, there are now different restraint systems available but these need to be considered in relation to the vehicle and your wheelchair type. Contact your local mobility centre for advice.

Automatic options

My mother has had a stroke. She has a driving licence but following the stroke she would like an automatic car. She has never driven an automatic before. What are the rules and regulations regarding an elderly, disabled driver, and with different types of car?

Dr Mark Spinoza

HS: You must not drive a car for a least a month after having a stroke. If you have ongoing problems, you must inform the DVLA, who will ask you to complete a medical questionnaire. They will then decide what type of licence you are entitled to. This may be a full licence, time-limited or restricted to automatics or vehicles which have been adapted. The DVLA will be the arbiter of what vehicles you can drive.

If you are renewing your licence after you are 70 and you wish to renew previously held C1 or D1 entitlement, whether full or restricted, you must enclose a D4 medical form, completed by a doctor, in support of your application. Ricability produces a very good booklet on *Motoring after a Stroke* (www.ricability.org.uk).

Quality control

I understand that adaptations are now available through Motability dealers direct, rather than arranged independently by disabled drivers. However, I have heard some real horror stories about the quality and behaviour of some of the companies Motability recommends for adaptations – particularly the mobile ones who do not have access to workshops because they come to the driver's home/dealer. What is Motability doing to ensure quality control for disabled drivers, who are relying on these companies to make their cars usable?

Jane Young

HS: In our experience, we are confident that Motability treats all complaints against accredited adaptation companies seriously and they are fully investigated. For a company to achieve accreditation, it has to comply with a strict set of standards set by Motability. Suppliers are subject to spot checks to ascertain that they are complying with these standards. If you feel you have cause for complaint, then do complain. For poor service to continue to exist, it takes dissatisfied customers to do nothing. Motability is zealous in protecting its reputation when its name is linked to a supplier.

DB: I was very concerned to read your comments. Please be assured that accredited conversion companies agree to a set of requirements aimed at ensuring customers receive a good level of service. While companies are usually very professional, if you are aware of specific cases where there have been problems then please contact us and we will investigate the situation and help to resolve any issues.

Car hoist

I would like to know where I can get a small hoist to help lift me off the seat of the car into a wheelchair on the pavement. It doesn't need to be particularly high, just able to lift me, and preferably something that is compact, that I can fold away into the boot of my car. Mr Preston

DB: There are a number of people hoists that can actually be fitted to a vehicle to aid transfers, but generally the assistance of another person is needed to use and stow the equipment. Ricability provides a guide with information regarding people-lifters, which you might wish to refer to (tel: 020 7427 2460 or visit www.ricability.org.uk). Always make a point of trying out any product before you make your decision and ensure that whoever needs to operate it will be comfortable doing so.

EP: One option may be the Milford Person Lift (*below*), which is designed to lift people from their wheelchair into their vehicle and out again. It can be operated by the disabled person or a helper and will fit most vehicles. Further information from Autochair (tel: 0800 214 045 or visit www.autochair.co.uk).

Blue badge renewal

My blue badge has eight months to run, but the end date is hard to see because it has been faded by the sun. I have asked for a replacement but they will only issue one up to my renewal date. Is it not possible to date them on a black background in white writing so it will not fade! Or as my car is a Motability car and the tax disc is sent by Motability is it not possible to issue a blue tax disc that would show anyone I have a blue badge?

Peter Durkin

GW: The regulations governing the replacement of blue badges state that where a badge has been lost, stolen or destroyed, or has become so damaged or faded as no longer to be adequately legible, a replacement badge may be issued with the word "duplicate" marked on the front.

A replacement badge is valid from the date of issue until the original badge would have ceased to be valid.

As for the issue of a blue tax disc, I contacted the DVLA and they said that the colours of tax discs are changed monthly, which enables police officers to identify expired discs easily. Also, such a disc would not show that the actual badge holder was with the vehicle, as

with the current blue badge.

HS: The orange badge was replaced by the blue badge to ensure consistency with European badges, so any changes to the badge would mean that it could be used in this country only. The same problem would apply to the tax disc solution. It would not be recognised in Europe and it would create inconsistencies between Motability customers and other blue badge holders in the UK.

Prosthetics problem

My cousin lost his hands and feet to meningitis and he is now trying to get back to normal life. He wants to drive. As he has only lost his feet he can control the pedals. However, can you tell me how he would control the steering/secondary controls with his prosthetic limbs? My cousin is worried about other road users' safety. Gary Anderson

HS: As a fellow quadruple amputee from meningitis, I'm glad to hear that your cousin is now well enough to contemplate driving again. Although it is legal to drive with prostheses, if they're below the knee this is not always recommended. I suggest that your cousin contacts his nearest mobility centre where he can try out a variety of different adaptations (visit www.mobility-centres.org.uk).

Once he has identified what adaptations he needs, they will be able to recommend a suitable garage to carry out the conversions. Once he has the correct adaptations there is no reason why your cousin wouldn't be as safe on the road as anyone else.

DB: The Limbless Association will be a useful source of information and guidance for you (tel: 020 8788 1777 or visit www.limbless-association.org). For specific information regarding tailored driving controls, your cousin needs to have an assessment of his driving needs. This can take place at a mobility centre. Your cousin must also inform the DVLA of his medical circumstances by completing a medical questionnaire on their website (www.dvla.gov.uk) or by calling them (tel: 0870 240 2963).

Van is not the answer

I am a C5 tetraplegic – I broke my neck five years ago. I've been to MAVIS (Mobility Advice and Vehicle Info Service) in Bracknell, but it is closing. It's a great tragedy that all that experience is being lost.

I'm looking to create a drive-from-wheelchair package for a van, but it will be quite big and expensive. Do you know of a small vehicle with a ramp at the back, which I could drive from my wheelchair? It would have to be automatic and have power-steering. James Gregory

EP: Although the MAVIS has closed, the Department for Transport is continuing to support the development of mobility centres. The new centre at Southampton (tel: 023 8051 2222 or email: admin@soton-centre.co.uk) now covers much of the old MAVIS catchment area and the Forum of Mobility Centres has recently introduced a "drive from wheelchair" assessment service that covers the whole of the UK. There are a number of small vehicles, such as the Vexel Quovis (*see page xxvi*) or a conversion of the Renault Kangoo by Sirius Automotive (tel: 01922 647755 or visit www.sirusautomotive.com), that can be driven from a wheelchair, so you don't necessarily have to consider large vehicles such as the Chrysler Voyager or Mercedes Sprinter.

To give you an idea of price, the Sirius converted Renault Kangoo 1.6 Expression automatic is available through the Motability scheme with an advance payment of £7,750. However, a grant may be available through the Motability scheme to help fund this.

DB: The type of WAV that will be suitable for you will depend on the dimensions of you seated in your wheelchair, any other passengers you need to carry, and any equipment you need to transport. The initial measurements you will require are your seated head height and your seated eyeline height (from the ground to your eye level while seated in your wheelchair). You can then use the *Motability Vehicle Suitability Guide* or the *Price Guide* to narrow down your vehicle search. This information is available online at www.motability.co.uk and can also be requested through the Motability customer helpline – details on page xxvi.

For more questions and answers, visit :
www.disabilitynow.org.uk



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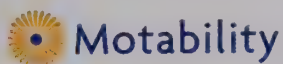
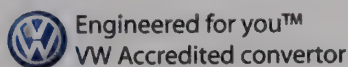


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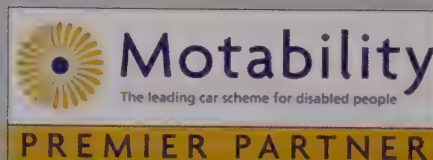


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Easy riders

Bob Ross checks out scooters, sensors and stickers

PETROL DRIVEN SCOOTERS

What? Charging up batteries for an electric scooter may not always be convenient or possible. A new alternative to the battery-powered scooter are the petrol-powered Nippi and Trippi three-wheeled scooters. The Nippi scooter can be driven direct from a wheelchair. The Nippi can travel at speeds of up to 70 mph and has a fuel consumption of up to 80 mpg. There are three engine sizes: 50, 80, or 125cc. Access is gained via a ramp at the rear of the scooter which, when folded, forms a tailgate.

A scooter seat is an available option and the Nippi is also available with a hardtop canopy, for extra protection during all weathers. The Trippi is similar to the Nippi but has a conventional scooter-riding platform and is designed for use by the slightly more agile rider. Second-hand models of the Nippi and the Trippi can be supplied and both are available under the Motability scheme.

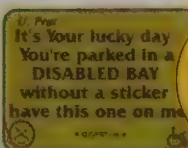
How much? Nippi from £5,995 (depending on model, engine capacity, etc) and the Trippi from £3,795.
Where? Nippi Vehicles Limited, The Workshops, Lodge Hill, Tutbury, Staffs DE13 9HF; tel: 01283 520620 or visit www.nippi.co.uk



CAR STICKERS AND SIGNS

What? When using a vehicle, it is sometimes necessary to draw the attention of other road-users, pedestrians, etc, to the need for extra space in order to access equipment such as wheelchair hoists, access ramps, tail lifts, etc. As a means of doing this there are a variety of useful signs and labels available, ranging from "Disabled Driver" stickers to "wheelchair hoist in use" stickers and blue badge holders. These and other vehicle accessories, including items such as "blind spot" mirrors are available from GP Special Projects.

How much? From approximately £2 per sticker
Where? GP Special Projects Ltd (GPSP), PO Box 900, Lincoln LN6 9ZW; tel: 01522 688388 or visit www.disabledstickers.co.uk



WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE CARAVANS

What? For the wheelchair-user who fancies caravanning, Fry's Caravans has produced two new caravans, the Frystar Access 55 and the Frystar Access 65 which are completely wheelchair-accessible throughout. The 55 (right) is a single axle two/three-berth caravan with an L-shaped lounge. The 65 (top) is a four berth caravan with a double axle and L-shaped front end with a drop window. Design features include: easy access washroom, toilet, wet room; wide access doors; steel framed beds; and standard access ramp. Options include: lifting hoist, wet room chair, access platform, entrance lift, and remote CD/radio/MP3 player.

How much? Frystar Access 55: £17,000. Frystar Access 65: £19,000.

Where? Fry's Caravans, Cranswick Industrial Estate, Beverley Road, Cranswick, Driffield, East Yorks YO25 9QE; tel: 01377 271383 or visit www.frys.co.uk

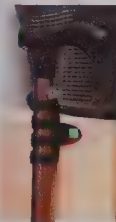


"SNAP ON" STICK AND CRUTCH HOLDERS

What? Walking sticks and crutches enable many people to get around and in particular to get to and from their car or other form of transport. However, when getting into or out of the car, sticks and crutches can often get in the way. One useful and easy way of clamping sticks or crutches in place is to use the "snap on" crutch or stick holder. The magnetic plate on the crutch holder clip will clamp on to the car body, tricycle or bicycle frame (or supermarket trolley!) and hold the stick or crutch in place while you position yourself, drive, etc. In addition to the crutch and stick holder magnetic clip, a small metal plate is separately available which can be fitted to wooden surfaces, etc, in order for the crutch holder clips to be used in a number of situations and environments.

How much? £17.50 per pair.

Where? Nordic Care Services Limited, Becket Lodge, Harbledown Park, Canterbury, Kent CT2 8NR; tel: 01227 479293 or visit www.walkeze.co.uk



REAR PARKING SENSOR

What? For those car drivers with restricted neck or head movement, parking, particularly in tight spaces, can sometimes prove difficult. However, one way of making reverse manoeuvring easier and safer is by using a rear parking sensor. There are a number of parking sensors available but one of the easiest to fit is the SR2 Targa "Ready To Go" rear parking sensor which is fitted behind the rear registration plate and therefore requires no body work drilling or re-spraying. It has a low current draw on the battery and has a 1.5 metre detection range. The sensor activates automatically when reverse gear is selected and an audible in-car bleep signal increases its intensity until a constant tone indicates the need to stop the vehicle. The SR2 Targa is suitable for use on most vehicles including vans, motorhomes, caravans and trailers.

How much? £130 or £250 including fitting.

Where? Mobility Conversions Limited, Langley Road South, Salford, Manchester M6 6SY; tel: 0161 745 9737 or visit www.mobilityconversions.co.uk

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'If I was capable of working, I would work'

ELIZABETH CHOPPIN



In the final part of our Poverty Files, Elizabeth Choppin talks to the mum of two disabled children about speaking out and fighting back

Tough" and "steely" are not the most obvious descriptions of Kim Gleeson, from North Anston, South Yorkshire – tucked up on her sofa with a cup of tea, smiling sweetly – but they are probably the most appropriate.

As the mum of two disabled daughters, aged 12 and 13, she is well aware of what her family are up against and can rattle it off in list form. Lack of money and support, social isolation and a wonky benefits system are just part of the list.

In the best of times, Kim is faced with a monthly shortfall of about £50 to pay her family's costs – forcing her to fall behind in crucial bills like rent and council tax, which they are not exempt from.

But Kim is not going down quietly. "I'm lucky. I've adapted, I speak out. I used to be shy, but that is something I had to change in myself. I learned that those who shout the loudest get things."

For example, when the council neglected to adapt or move the family from council housing where Kim had to carry her daughter Annalise, who is severely disabled, up and down a flight of stairs, damaging her own knees, she took her story to the local papers. Now she lives in a single storey, three bedroom council property with her husband of two years, Richard, Annalise and her younger daughter, Gemma, who has dyspraxia.

Previously, she went on BBC Radio Five Live to discuss issues facing families with disabled children and is involved in the Every Disabled Child Matters campaign for better services and support for disabled children and their

families. "Somebody's got to say these things," she says.

But all of this doesn't change the fact that the family is seriously struggling to afford basic necessities. Kim makes sure to buy enough food and keep the house warm in winter, as Annalise has chronic lung disease, but this simply means other bills go unpaid.

"I'm always going to be on this poverty line and getting nowhere," says Kim, who is frustrated that her children's tax credits are less than they should be – £71 as opposed to £121 – because the government had been accidentally overpaying for several years without her knowledge.

"It's not my fault that happened and yet I'm paying for it now," she says. "You're made to feel that you're too lazy to work or you don't want to – but that's just not true." Annalise requires lengthy hospital stays up to four times a year. The length of time in hospital is varied and unpredictable, making it difficult for Kim to hold down a job.

"No employer wants

'I'm lucky. I've adapted. I speak out.'

somebody they can't rely on," she says. "If I was capable of working, I would work. It's something I'd be willing to do."

Yet she is sure that if she took part-time or agency work, it would make her family worse off financially than remaining on benefit. She would have to pay £30 an hour for childcare, as Annalise requires at least two carers.

Affordable, properly-trained child carers would definitely help, says Kim.

"Financially, we'd be better off if Richard got the sack," she explains, adding that he is not eligible for working tax credits. If Richard collected benefits, they would get a break on prescriptions, council tax and rent – all of which they have to pay for now. "But he continues working out of pride and a sense of self-worth."

She thinks the government is grossly neglecting carers like her and that there should be a more substantial financial recognition of all the work carers do.

"You're not a person. You're just seen as a carer," she says. "Carer's allowance is supposed to compensate for having a job, but it's an insult. How many jobs would pay less than £50 for a full week of work? It should be in line with a job," she adds. "I don't want an astronomical amount of money, but I want to be paid fairly."

The amount of Annalise's disability living allowance is not enough to cover her disability-related costs, which include driving a 26 miles round trip to a special school.

Kim's adapted vehicle guzzles £80 of gas a week but Motability said she had to stick with her current car until the end of her three-year contract.

When they do get a few hours respite care from a community service, Kim and Richard go to a friend's house to share a bottle of wine – "because it's cheaper than going out".

The family also receive enough money each year from the Family Fund charity to take a holiday within the UK. But entertainment in North Anston is limited to taking out free DVDs from a mobile library and closing the curtains to create a makeshift cinema.

"Life is what you make of it. It's the British way, isn't it – you get on with things. We're close as a family. If it wasn't for that, I think I'd have gone insane."

What Kim would like to see is benefits staff with more disability awareness and a real understanding of the issues.

She'd like to see tax relief on fuel for people who have an adapted vehicle.

She also believes that families with disabled people, especially children, should receive tax relief on healthy food. "I buy quite a bit of what I'd call junk food, like reformed ham, which has additives and salt. It's not healthy but it's six times cheaper than buying it on the bone."

Kim would also appreciate a bit of help with heating in the winter. "I dread winter each year because of the cost of heating," she says.

The family does get help from Joseph Rowntree, which provides washer/dryers and fridge/freezers when needed. In the past, Kim has had to take out a loan with a 62 per cent interest rate to replace these items. "You have to use agencies like that because nobody else will touch you," she says.

"I can't afford the things we really need. Poverty seems such an old-fashioned word to me – it makes me think of the miners' strike. I don't think it should be happening in this day and age. But every year it gets harder and harder."

Ins and outs

WEEKLY INCOME:

(some figures are approximate)

Richard's salary – £220/week

Child tax credits – £71/week

Disability living allowance – £55/week (care)

(£47/week mobility component goes straight to Motability car)

Carer's allowance – £48.65/week

Weekly total: £394.65/week

WEEKLY EXPENDITURE:

(some figures are approximate)

Rent – £67.50

Council tax – £18

Electricity – £10

Water – £10

Gas – £30 (up to £50 during the winter)

Fuel – £80 (during term-time)

Credit card payments – £6

£1,000 loan repayment – £27

Rubber pants/clothing/supplies for girls – £14

Food + household items – £136 (includes girls' school dinners)

Telephone landline – £3.50

Broadband – £1

Mobiles (two) – £18

Contents insurance – £4

Pet insurance/food – £4

Painkillers (for Annalise) – £5

Prescriptions – £7

Weekly total: – £441

See next month's DN for a full analysis of our seven-month investigation

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Letters to the Editor

Send your letters to the acting editor, John Pring, Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW, minicom: 020 7619 7332, fax: 020 7619 7331, email: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk. Please include your telephone number.

New ways to care

Eve Rank has missed the point (*DN May, letters*). If monies were directed to disabled people to help them with the purchase of equipment, employing their own personal assistants to give them choice and control to live independently, the non-disabled/disabled spouse/partner/family member/friend, who at present provides the support would be freed to go back into employment, enjoy

sport, socialise, whatever they wish to do.

As far as the word "carer" is concerned, do we not all care for each other in our own way?

Well done, Simone, carry on the campaign for disabled people to be empowered to control their life independently! F Montford, Centre for Independent Living Kent – Independence and Access Matters Project

Trikers, play it safe and wear a helmet

We are all made aware how precious our head is and if riding a pushbike, motorbike or horse, or mountaineering, the advice is always to wear a helmet.

I was somewhat surprised then when reading my June issue of *DN* to find on page 17 an advertisement for Martin Conquest's wheelchair-accessible, high-performance trike. It shows a guy

riding along, but without a helmet. I would have thought that the editor of *DN* would have censored this advertisement, as it is in bad taste. After all, a lot of your readers will have suffered head injuries, possibly as a result of not wearing a helmet. Deduct yourself 200 Brownie points.

Ian Holt, Blackpool
See get in gear, page xviii

Remploy charities 'misguided'

I work in Remploy Stockton-on-Tees. I was told the factory would be closing down after December 2007. I was shocked to hear that Mencap, Mind, RADAR, Scope, Leonard Cheshire and RNID have supported the closures.

Phil Davis, national secretary of the GMB union, accused the six charities which have supported closure plans of acting in a "despicable manner".

The RNIB commented on the six charities that supported factory closures, saying "they are misguided in allowing themselves to be used as the government's publicity machine" and "they are unwise to put themselves at odds with so many of the disabled people



they purport to represent – and their trade unions".

I would like to add the following comments. The average age of a disabled worker in Stockton-on-Tees Remploy is 45-50 years old. Most people have worked there

on average 20-25 years. A large proportion of people in the factory have few qualifications. Most have one or two disabilities, sometimes three.

You can have all the disability legislation you want, but there are ways and means around it. You can legislate against all the isms, but you cannot change the culture overnight.

The six charities that want closure are supported by Remploy management. These charities should keep their mouths shut! They do not speak for the workers of Remploy. Keep the Remploy factories open!

A Remploy worker, by email

I would just like to ask Leonard Cheshire, Mencap, Mind, RADAR, RNID and Scope, who all supported the closing of 43 Remploy factories, how they intend to help the thousands of disabled workers who will be losing their jobs?

Alan Shoreman, by email
See Comment, page 21

Why things are looking up

Disabled people all have horror stories to tell, but as a wheelchair-user of more than 30 years, I can positively say "things are definitely on the up".

At the tender age of 16, 30 years ago, I came out of hospital after almost a year. I could not cross most roads as dropped kerbs were a rare thing. I remember being denied access to many places such as cinemas because I was a "health and safety risk" in case a fire broke out. Booking a hotel was difficult and as for flying, I'd have more luck trying to grow wings.

Disabled people didn't drive cars either, they had (bright blue) "invalid carriages" that stood out like a sore thumb and shouted out, "Look, I'm disabled."

Not only have there been many improvements in this time but more importantly people's attitudes have changed a great deal. We now have a place in society, but furthermore are accepted in the big, bad, outside world.

Correcting all the world's access issues is a mammoth task, especially in a country as old as the UK, but we are getting there. Not only have "invalid carriages" been scrapped but the word invalid has been scrapped with it. We are getting there. We just need to see it.

Robin Kettle, Access All Areas
(www.access-auditing.com)

Parking in North Devon

Your article in the June issue suggests that parking charges for blue badge holders is only now being brought in (*DN June, Motoring*). In fact, this has been the case in North Devon (and in Torridge) for several years.

As anybody in a wheelchair will know, it can take twice as long to get one's business done in town: we have to take tedious detours to find a suitable crossing-place with dropped kerb, and once we get into a shop it's not always easy to get what we need, or else find ourselves up a "blind alley" in smaller shops, necessitating time-consuming manoeuvring to get out again! All of this takes up precious money on our parking ticket, meaning we end up paying for twice as much time to achieve the same amount as a non-disabled person.

Our local council issues a

magazine. In a recent article on parking, they point out that not all their car parks charge the same rate and remind us that "not only could it save you money, but if you choose to park on the outskirts of town you could be helping to reduce congestion in our busy town centres". But what use are cheaper out-of-town car parks to a disabled person?

Once again we will have to pay for more time, to allow for the detours necessary to avoid narrow or non-existent pavements. I would suggest that, by forcing disabled people (who are already among the most economically disadvantaged) to pay the same rate as other people for parking, which in effect means paying twice as much per shopping trip, councils are in effect discriminating against disabled people.

Fiona Archer, Devon

Somerset parking problems

I have noticed an increase in blue badge charging in various areas (*DN June, Motoring*). This is a step by councils to increase revenue. The problem has far-reaching consequences, which is now proven by South Somerset District Council, which claims it has taken a step toward equality, so that disabled people are treated as non-disabled people are. This means people with disabilities are being treated less favourably!

All nearby car parks are now short-stay, whereas before they were long-stay for disabled people. I can only park for an hour, remove my car and not return for another hour. I can park in long-stay car parks, but

these are further away and on steep gradients.

The council only consulted with one disability group, which has a small membership, and it seems that only four people agreed to this. Since 5 December, 2006, the law requires proper consultation with disabled people and groups to have taken place, and a proper representative proportion.

The South-West has a poor transport system, and people rely on their cars to access facilities. The council intends to make Yeovil town centre pedestrianised. Disabled people will suffer through this. Gillian Saunders, Blue Badge Parking South-West

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Stop stereotyping disability

I am a 50-year-old disabled woman, who has had chronic rheumatoid arthritis in all of my joints now for over 30 years. It seems to be that the majority of people have an image in their minds of how a disabled person should look and act.

I am fed up with people discriminating against me just because I do not fit their stereotypical image of a disabled person. I do not use a wheelchair. I do not have a carer. I do not continually complain about my predicament (as I am very aware that there are people a lot worse off than myself).

I have had taxi drivers act "off" with me when I have asked them for help with heavy bags. When this has happened I have actually said to them that they should never judge a book by the cover and then show them my deformed hands, which, after they have seen them, they completely change towards me. But why should I

have to do that and humiliate myself?

I have been in the supermarket queue and heard people tutting and moaning about me taking so long to pack my shopping into my trusty trolley (I always go to the disabled aisle). I usually say something like: "Sorry for the delay folks, I am a disabled person."

Once a lady who was working on the checkout said, "You don't look disabled and you're not even in a wheelchair." I was horrified. Please would somebody explain to me how a disabled person is supposed to actually look?

I write this letter with no intention of disrespecting anyone who is a wheelchair-user. Some people believe that how you look determines how much support or care you may need.

Barbara Stewart, London

NHS casualties date back decades

Anyone would think that injured servicemen getting poor service from the NHS is a recent thing (*DN March, News focus*), only happening since Iraq.

I was injured whilst serving in the Royal Navy in 1970 and have had to put up with poor service for the last 37 years.

D Watson, by email

web watch

Have your say and join others chatting at www.disabilitynow.org.uk

What do you think of the logo for the 2012 Games? It's kinda weird.
Neal

Weird is not the word, and it only costs £400,000 – cheap very cheap when you think what the rest costs.
Robn

I'd have done them a weird drawing for a lot less than that.
Neal

The mind boggles. They spend nearly £500,000 on a logo nobody seems to like to help raise cash to train Olympic hopefuls (then again it does change colour).
Scouse Tony

Do you mean disabled or non-disabled athletes? Disabled people who have any chance of getting a medal are already picked and are being trained and given grants. Non-disabled again are paid upwards or in excess of £100,000.
Robn

I meant all Olympic hopefuls. I try not to discriminate. I believe the total estimated cost has soared from £2 billion to £9.3 billion – nearly five times what they originally thought and they have five years to go yet. I would hate to get that guy to estimate any work on my house.
Scouse Tony

The logo should show a London rate-payer buckled under the burden of taxes for the next 1,000 years... sort of Charles Atlas pose...with Uncle Ken smoking a large cigar ... with the words underneath, "Am I bovvered?"
Robn

backchat

● Backchat's email inbox has become clogged up by updates on the tortuous progress of Geoff Holt, the "inspirational" yachtsman aiming to become "the first disabled person" to sail solo around Britain – a task he has dubbed his "Personal Everest".

Of course, as there are about 10 million disabled people in the UK, backchat wonders how Geoff knows for sure that a deaf sailor with diabetes hasn't sneaked a quick circuit when no-one was looking.

Besides, exactly how high is Geoff's "Everest" when he has a back-up team and comes ashore every night for a hot meal?

Fortunately, there was the tale of Ben Carpenter to ease backchat's blood pressure, when his inbox was threatening a Personal Everest meltdown.

Mr Carpenter was taken on a hair-raising 50mph ride after his powerchair became trapped in the front grille of a lorry in Michigan, USA.

Mr Carpenter's only complaint after his ordeal? He'd spilled his soda. Now that's what backchat calls a Personal Everest.



Sussex Health Care

Rapkyns Care Centre, Broadbridge Heath, West Sussex
Beech Lodge, Broadbridge Heath, West Sussex

Sussex Health Care is an award winning group of care homes that were founded in 1985. Sussex Health Care now operate 15 care homes, predominantly in the West Sussex area, providing nearly 450 beds, incorporating specialist care provision as well as care for older people. Sussex Health Care currently have vacancies in two of our care homes:

Rapkyns Care Centre opened 2 new bungalows in January 2007. The home is based in Broadbridge Heath and caters for young people with complex and multiple needs. The home is comprised of three



bungalows for ten people and one for eleven which are purpose built and fully accessible for wheelchairs. Each single room provides en-suite facilities and track hoisting is available throughout. There is one bed available for respite care. There is a day centre on site with swimming pool and IT suite.

Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy is available to service users as is 24 hour nursing care. A speech and language therapist is also employed.

Beech Lodge is a purpose built bungalow which provides two wings of 10 bedrooms all with en-suite facilities providing care for young adults with multiple and complex needs. The registered Care Home with nursing has been equipped with all the latest technological aids and still provides a safe, comfortable, homely environment for our service users. Person Centred Planning is at the forefront of our philosophy with the service users needs and wishes at the centre of our service. Our philosophy is to provide the very best care in a safe and comfortable environment whilst respecting service users rights to live as normal a life as possible.



For further information: Please contact Corrine Wallace
Head of Specialist Care Services and Future Development
Tel: (01403) 217338 • Fax: 01403 210424

www.sussexhealthcare.org

Email: corrine.wallace@sussexhealthcare.org

Sussex Health Care also have homes which cater for residential services and the elderly.
For elderly care enquiries please contact Sharon Lambourne on 01403 217338.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



abnormally FUNNY



Travelling by bus beats easyJet-setting and even doing a gig on a cruise, says Steve Day

Hello, lovely DN readers. Here I am tucked away in DN amongst the mobility scooters and the adoration of St Tanni. It's a pleasure to be here, especially as I've been out and about helping the GOJO campaign to encourage young disabled people to get out and about on public transport. Visit www.mygojo.co.uk to see me and others giggling on a bus.

I do feel I should use the bus more often, especially as where we live in Lewisham there is on average about one bus per person. Bus travel is statistically much safer than car driving, something you need to consider if the likes of George Michael are driving around. He's my consolation, George, God's way of telling me that being deaf is not such a bad thing after all. I only wish, when the magistrate sentenced him, she had been wearing one of those Wham! T-shirts from the Eighties that

said "CHOOSE LIFE".

With the GOJO campaign in mind, I finally decided to use my bus, and got on to find there was one other passenger on board. It was just me, him and the driver, but for some reason we stopped at every stop. No-one got on and no-one got off. This puzzled me somewhat, 'til we'd been a

'George Michael is God's way of telling me being deaf is not so bad'

couple of miles and I suddenly realised I'd been leaning on the button.

I think I'm cursed when it comes to any form of transport. I often fly with easyJet, and I



now have an aversion to the colour orange. I get put off by the classification you get given on your boarding card, depending on how late you check in. A: Nutter who's camped out all night to be first; B: Slightly anal, wears a cardigan; C: Normal; D: Delinquent. The worst was when, for reasons of deafness, I got assigned PB on my boarding card: Pre Board. This was not the luxury I envisaged. Strolling on with the mums with babies I had 200 pairs of eyes burning into me, all thinking: "What the f-ing hell's wrong with him?" It was all I could do to not develop a sort of justificatory limp.

Even ships have been unlucky for me. I once did a gig on a cruise. I thought it would be all glamour, MILFs at sea or something, but it was nothing like that because everyone was so old. Not just slightly middle-aged but the oldest people I'd ever seen alive. People who looked like they were made of nothing but paper and a heartbeat. When the ship docked in Naples and a hearse pulled up at the dockside, I really wasn't sure if they were picking someone up, or dropping them off. My gig went really badly, and worse than that I realised I was stuck on the boat with them for another five days. That's when I found out one of the really good things about Alzheimer's disease because by the next day they'd forgotten the whole thing. Two of them thought I was their grandson; I got a cake and a new cardigan.

Come on everybody, get on the bus.

* For details of future Abnormally Funny People gigs, visit www.abnormallyfunnypeople.com

WORLD VIEW



ROBB ELLIS

Disabled people in Zimbabwe are facing poverty, exclusion, abuse and violence

I left Zimbabwe eight years ago, but having lived there for almost 40 years and grown up in a family with a strong medical background, I have a very good concept of what living with a disability in Zimbabwe entails. That I myself am now disabled is a coincidence.

Although I now live in the UK, I keep in close contact with many people in Zimbabwe, who for obvious reasons have to remain unnamed.

Family values in Africa as a whole, and Zimbabwe in particular, are high. But in the current political and economic climate in Zimbabwe, living with a disability is a huge encumbrance. The country does not have the disability network we see in the UK. Small organisations like St Giles, Jairos Jiri and RESCU have all but stopped operating, as costs are just too prohibitive.

Families with members who are disabled, whether physically or mentally, are largely left to handle the situation on their own. Some relatives see the birth of a child with a disability as a taboo that has brought a bad omen to the family. One must remember that African people are very spiritual. The subject of disability in Zimbabwe has largely been sacrosanct, and therefore remains unresolved.

Zimbabwean families are too busy just trying to get through each day to spend time looking after disabled people. Only the fit will survive.

The political and economic woes of the country no longer lend themselves to providing a society where people with disabilities can be afforded.

The British pound fetches a little more than Z\$500 on the official exchange rate, whilst on the unofficial market it will fetch in excess of Z\$50,000! The Poverty Datum Line – the amount of money that a five-member family requires to break even in any

given month – is Z\$1.4 million, but the average worker earns about Z\$50,000 per month.

Disabled people in Zimbabwe routinely face exclusion from education, employment, cultural activities, festivals, sports and social events and are especially vulnerable to poverty, physical and sexual violence, lack of access to healthcare, emotional abuse and neglect. Only 33 per cent of children with disabilities in Zimbabwe have access to education, compared with over 90 per cent for the non-disabled populace.

When disabled people become too much for any family to cope with, the normal thing is to book that person into a local government hospital under a false name so that when death occurs, the government is obliged to pick up the funeral costs with a pauper's burial. This is because the family are unable to foot the funeral costs.

An elderly black man, blind at birth, used to spend his days playing a home-made guitar and singing popular hymns – his voice loud and melodic, he was almost a landmark of First Street in Harare. His son would sit with him and "manage" the few coins that were donated by passers-by. But the municipal police chased them away and today they live at Hopley

Farm, in a cold, crude hut manufactured for them by sympathetic neighbours.

He eats about one small meal every three days and cannot afford to buy a regular supply of milk or bread.

He no longer plays the guitar. He no longer sings. He spends his days sitting in silence. He quietly sits awaiting death. His life is cursed. He will not survive the winter this year. He welcomes death, if only for the freedom it will afford his son.

The disabled people of Zimbabwe – hidden, ignored and abhorred – nothing more, nothing less.

'Zimbabwean families are too busy just trying to get through each day to spend time looking after disabled people'

Robb Ellis is a retired Zimbabwe Republic policeman now living in Derby. He runs the weblog The Bearded Man at www.thebeardedman.blogspot.com and www.messagefromafrica.com

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The impact of Rempoy's factory closures

Bob Warner believes that mainstream jobs are the best option for disabled workers, but Les Woodward says disabled people are still discriminated against in the workplace and need the option of supported employment

"We have guaranteed that no disabled person will be made compulsorily redundant"



The Rempoy proposals are based on principles which we believe reflect the consensus view of the disability movement. Firstly, wherever possible, employment in the mainstream is preferable to segregated employment; secondly, "supported employment" is best delivered in a mainstream environment; and thirdly, there is a role for supported work environments, but these should primarily focus on helping people into mainstream employment.

Rempoy will remain the largest employer of disabled people in the UK, with well over 2,000 disabled people in our factories (right). But we want those factories to deliver meaningful employment at a cost which makes sense for the taxpayer, providing the opportunity for people to progress to mainstream employment as soon as they can.

Our programme of change is not about jobs being axed, it is about quadrupling the jobs we find each year in mainstream employment for disabled people – people like Kevin Skinner, who for 10 years worked in Rempoy's Dundee

factory but had ambitions to find work more suited to his abilities. With support from Rempoy, Kevin secured a job as an environmental caretaker with Angus Housing.

He says: "I was beginning to feel restricted in the factory as the job was not really what I wanted. I feel much happier now and find the work very rewarding."

Rempoy cannot compete with the low-cost economies of Asia and Eastern Europe. Each job in our factories costs £20,000 a year and for the same money we can place four disabled people a year in fulfilling mainstream jobs.

We have guaranteed that no disabled person will be made compulsorily redundant. We will find jobs on current Rempoy terms and conditions for any employee who wants to continue working. We know we can do it, because last year we found jobs in mainstream employment for well over 5,000 disabled people with the same range of disabilities as our factory employees.

Disabled job-seekers tell us that they prefer to work in mainstream jobs alongside non-disabled colleagues.

The minute you assume someone cannot work in mainstream employment, you will certainly ensure they don't. **Bob Warner, chief executive, Rempoy**



"The claims made that there will be no compulsory redundancies are a red herring"



As an employee of the Rempoy Swansea factory for the last 24 years and with multiple hidden disabilities, I firmly believe that the proposal to close factories is wrong and a betrayal of the disabled people who work in them.

Skilled disabled workers in Rempoy produce top-quality

goods and services for top blue-chip companies in the UK, at price, to quality, and to time. We do not sit around tables and basket-weave. We have good quality employment under trade union-negotiated terms and conditions.

The Rempoy board and others ignore the fact that disabled people are still discriminated against in the workplace. Working-class disabled people are still more likely to be

unemployed, to experience child poverty or if in work, to be in low-paid, low-skilled employment.

We have seen colleagues actively encouraged to take jobs with other employers, sever their links with Rempoy and then lose everything when the company they were placed with sheds labour.

As a disabled person they were the first to go – illegal, but it happens all too frequently.

Crosfield Industries, a supported employer funded by

Croydon Council, closed last year with the loss of 87 jobs. Of those 87 disabled people, 80 are still languishing on benefits, a direct contradiction of the government's aim of getting people off benefits and into work.

No-one forces us to stay in Rempoy, but we choose to work there just as non-disabled colleagues are free to choose where they work. I have learnt new skills, experienced new challenges and worked in Rempoy with dignity. The claims made that there will be no compulsory redundancies of disabled workers are a red herring. We do not want to be sitting at home getting paid by the company for doing nothing any more than we want to sit at home languishing on state handouts. At the moment, we have the choice whether or not to work in a Rempoy factory.

If our factories are taken away, then we do not have that choice and neither will future generations of disabled people.

Let those who stand in judgement talk to Rempoy workers – as no-one has so far – but don't dare to presume to know what's best for us. **Les Woodward, an employee at Rempoy's Swansea factory and a representative of the Rempoy Trade Union Consortium**



KEY NOTES

ANDY RICKELL

How will Gordon Brown's impairment affect his leadership?

The question disabled people need to ask about Gordon Brown is: Will this national leader be committed to disabled people's equality and human rights, and understand how to achieve them?

No politician would dare say anything against disabled people's equality and rights, so the issues are whether they are truly committed to them, and whether they really understand how to achieve them. No Prime Minister has really come close, so Gordon could be the first.

We need a PM who sees disability as a discriminatory social construct that needs a political solution, and the leadership to give it the necessary priority and funding.

Such a person is rare. So far, only a minority of people, some

of whom identify themselves as disabled people from the disabled people's movement, see disability that way.

What about Gordon? A person who has experienced impairment which has resulted in discrimination – attitudinal, organisational and/or environmental – has experienced the social model definition of disability, and therefore has an advantage in understanding the true nature of disability and how to overcome it.

It's not clear that Gordon's visual impairment has yet given him this understanding – witness his difficulty in acknowledging it when being voted the most influential disabled person in *DN's* poll – but it may offer him a head start over other PMs.

However, while being impaired helps, and self-defining as a disabled person is even better, what is also needed is an utter commitment to disability as a human rights issue, the willingness to change society, and the allocation of resources to fully include disabled people. That requires guts – a rare thing for any person, including politicians!

But that is not enough. Gordon also needs a robust analysis and understanding of how discrimination operates. Everyone claims to accept inclusion is best, but some people claim this is achieved through segregated education, employment and living. We need a leader who can see through the double-speak, too.

Andy is an executive director at Scope

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Stannah
The Stairlift People

Dear Rachel

• love and loneliness • personal problems • advice and support

Rachel Wilson, who is disabled herself, has spent many years advising on disability matters. Write to her at *Disability Now*, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW or email your problem to editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



Grab rails

I am about to be moved into a housing association flat. It's one of those places with the structural validity of an antique chicken shack.

I have cerebral palsy, and like to have a few grab rails around just to hold on to. How pushy can I be with my new housing association landlords to supply grab rails screwed into the floor as the walls are made of plasterboard? They say I don't need them often enough. I can go for a week without touching them but if I wobble, I will fall unless there's something to grab on to. **Chris, by email**

In my opinion, the housing association has no grounds to tell you that you may not have a grab rail if you require it and, by definition, it needs to be securely fixed.

Under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act, it is illegal for a housing association to treat you less favourably on the grounds of disability and, in my opinion, this would include refusing to

allow the installation of aids and adaptations, which you need for daily living. The issue of how often you use them is irrelevant, since it is impossible to predict when you are going to lose your balance.

I understand the point you are making about plasterboard rather than solid brick walls. It is possible to buy rawlplugs designed for plasterboard to help support the weight of any fixing, but ask a builder whether these could take the strain of a grab rail in use.

If the rails need to be fixed into a solid surface, then it is reasonable for you to ask the housing association to arrange this for you.

Travel woe

I am disabled and have a number of medical conditions. I am having difficulty finding a company that will offer me reasonable travel insurance. Can you help? **Alan, Liverpool**

There are several companies that offer travel insurance to

people with pre-existing medical conditions. If you have access to the internet, you can find a list of companies at www.youreable.com. Policies will vary slightly between companies, so it is worth shopping around. Some offer insurance for personal assistants and non-disabled family members as part of the policy.

One company you might try to contact for general insurance advice is Travelbilty, and the Association of British Insurers. • *Travelbilty, tel: 0845 338 1638 or email: enquiries@travelbilty.co.uk* The Association of British Insurers, tel: 020 7600 3333 or visit www.abi.org.uk

Blue badge fine

I am a blue badge holder and I have just received a parking fine from my local council because they say that my badge and clock were not clearly displayed. I have paid the fine, but could you clarify the position? **Robert, Portsmouth**

Your letter does not say

Feeling lonely

I am in my early 60s and I am disabled with arthritis which means I have some difficulty walking, particularly outside.

My husband died seven years ago and I have been feeling lonely. I have tried joining a couple of agencies and although I have had a good response, once I tell people who have contacted me about my arthritis they either treat me differently and become angry that I haven't mentioned it before, or lose interest and do not contact me again. I am feeling really miserable. **Patricia, Derby**

I am sorry to hear that you are feeling so fed up, but it is entirely understandable, particularly after bereavement, even if it is not recent. It is very disappointing and upsetting for you that you have had such a negative experience with dating.

What I would say is that the fact that the people that you met had such a problem with your disability says more about them than it does about you. If they are so shallow and narrow-minded as to not be able to cope with your difference, then it is better to find out now, as they are probably not the sort of people with whom you would want to become emotionally involved.

However, this is little consolation if you are feeling lonely. It might be worth trying to expand your circle of friends, rather than focusing on finding a new relationship. If you join clubs or begin activities which interest you, you are more likely to meet like-minded people.

SAGA, the organisation for people over 50, offers a range of services including community services. They have a friendship and discussion forum which is primarily aimed at those who have a computer, but it would be worth contacting them to see whether they can advise you as to new social opportunities.

Although your bereavement was some years ago, you might also consider contacting Cruse Bereavement Care for further advice.

• *Contact SAGA, The Saga Building, Middelburg Square, Folkestone, Kent CT20 1AZ. Tel: 01303 771 111, www.saga.co.uk* Cruse Bereavement Care, tel: 0844 477 9400, email: helpline@cruse.org.uk

whereabouts in the car your clock and badge were displayed, but the information which accompanies badges when they are issued does outline conditions of use. It does also say that the clock and badge should be placed where they are clearly visible. The definition of what constitutes being "clearly visible" is, of course, open to interpretation and if you wished to appeal the fine (although you've paid it), you would need to argue that the badge and clock were, in fact, visible.

Minivan help

I am not disabled myself, but frequently drive a lady who is a wheelchair-user in an adapted minivan. I am having difficulty finding anyone to insure the vehicle. Could you advise me please? **Peter, by email**

You might like to try Fish Insurance. They offer several policies, including one designed for disabled drivers and passengers, including the insurance of modified vehicles. They do not use disability as a "weighting" factor for policy terms or premiums and the policy terms are more responsive to the needs of disabled drivers and passengers than some other motor insurance policies. I am

not in a position to recommend their policy to you, but it would be worth contacting them.

For general advice, contact Mobilise, the organisation for disabled motorists.

• *Fish Insurance: 2-4 Riversway Business Village, Navigation Way, Preston PR2 2YP, tel: 01772 724442 or email admin@fishinsurance.co.uk* Mobilise, tel: 01508 489449 or visit www.mobilise.info



Help at the end of the phone

DN's telephone counsellor Lin Berwick gives disabled people and carers advice and support on personal and spiritual problems. Disabled herself, Lin is a psychotherapeutic counsellor and Methodist local preacher, with a postgraduate diploma in homeopathic medicine. If you have something you need to discuss in confidence, talk to her on Mondays 6pm-10pm and Thursdays 1pm-5pm, tel: 01787 882 111.

Do you have concerns about medical treatment received by you or a family member?

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Foot Anstey are recognised as a leading firm in the investigation of medical negligence claims. We hold a franchise with the Legal Services Commission which enables us to offer Legal Aid in appropriate circumstances. Alternate methods of funding are also available.

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For further information or to arrange an appointment please contact 0845 111 4008 or email: medical@foot-ansteys.co.uk

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ASK THE READERS

"Does anyone have any experiences of how other countries treat disabled people in comparison with the UK?"

Inclusive Italy

My aunty, a wheelchair-user, has just returned from a holiday in Italy. She told me the airline she flew with, Flybe, were excellent and very attentive. They gave her a premium seat, by a doorway with plenty of legroom and for the whole journey she was well looked after. Her transfers to and from the aircraft were completely hassle-free. At her bed & breakfast in Italy the staff had a ramp already in place and her room was well adapted to her needs. While sightseeing she encountered nothing that made her feel any different from the rest of the holidaymakers.

Sue

I found people in Italy kind and helpful, and unpatronising. Not just in hotels, but restaurants, shops, the Metro, everywhere. I wasn't made to feel different.

Neal

People versus buildings

I'm a C5/6 quadriplegic living in Belgium and I've travelled throughout Africa, Europe, Australia and North America.

Belgium is certainly not as accessible as the UK, which in turn lags behind the US and Australia, but people are similar in their reactions – it is easy to find help although people sometimes shy away from disabled people in public places. The interesting point is that when I'm in Africa buildings are less accessible, but people are much more willing to help.

Gordon Rattray
www.able-travel.com

NEXT MONTH'S QUESTION:

"Disability products make life easier and more enjoyable. But prices are seldom disclosed and are negotiable. Why? And do they offer value for money?"

R LaPorte, Stevenage

Send your questions and answers to "Ask The Readers" at our usual address or email: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

The best reply or question will receive vouchers worth £25.



SIMON SAYS

Disabled young people can feel marginalised when it comes to exploring emotional and sexual feelings

The advantage of mainstream schooling over special schools is all very well in principle. However, in practice, the reality is often far from the ideal. One area of inclusion that seems to have received little attention is that of sex and relationship education within the mainstream and how far this has been made relevant and accessible to disabled pupils.

Disabled clients have often said to me that they didn't remember much about their sex education or if they did it didn't seem relevant to them. But even the general population gets a poor deal when it comes to sex education.

In a MORI poll in 2006, nearly 50 per cent of the public thought that children in school were provided with too little information about sex and 84 per cent supported the idea that schools should teach more about sexual behaviour and relationships, not just the basic biology.

Given that much is made of the positive inclusion of mainstream schooling, it may be going to waste. Staff may be poorly informed or trained about disability and impairments where sex and relationships are concerned and can often therefore fail to cover this in a way that is truly inclusive for disabled pupils. It

'Even the general population gets a poor deal when it comes to sex education'

can be even more complex if impairments are less obvious or even not disclosed.

This is a time when young people are experiencing physical, sexual and emotional changes and a time when disabled people can begin to feel left out or perhaps left behind by their peers who are experimenting and exploring. The right kind of intervention at this time can be invaluable in helping non-

disabled and disabled young people understand each other's feelings and how much they have in common.

It is vital that disabled people are given the chance to talk together with their non-disabled peers about being different, to discuss how they see each other, both physically and sexually. Accessing relationships and being able to explore their thoughts, feelings and desires for the future may go some way to preventing much of the isolation that many disabled people begin to feel as they enter young adulthood.

Social and sexual skills do not just drop from the sky, but are the result of experience with our peers as well as having good, clear, unbiased information, relevant to our needs. It is also about sharing safely what it's like for us, and hearing what our non-disabled colleagues feel and think about us. This not only helps us but also educates others, which in turn helps us.

Send your relationship questions to "Simon Says" at the usual postal address or email: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

BEYOND BOUNDARIES exhibition 2007 **LIVE**

June 29th-30th, Sandown Park, Esher
www.beyondboundarieslive.co.uk

Beyond Boundaries Live is a new, national consumer show, which will provide opportunities for disabled visitors to get involved in a host of new activities.

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LIVE

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LIVE

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LIVE

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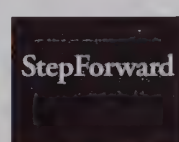
LIVE

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LIVE

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Media Partners



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Pre book your free tickets online today at
www.beyondboundarieslive.co.uk or
call 0208 614 0833.



Comedy



Little Do They Know

Little Do They Know is the first solo show from Tanyalee Davis, a member of comedy act Abnormally Funny People. When the publicity material helpfully informed me that while she was small in size, her spirit was 10 feet tall, it didn't bode well. As someone perfectly content with her four foot two (ish) spirit, I was sure I was going to hate it, but the feisty restricted growth comic managed to overcome her poor publicity material to perform a fast-paced, funny show.

Tanyalee zips through her life story, from growing up in 1970s Canada and crossing the US border as an illegal immigrant, to touring the UK.

She is a charismatic and ballsy performer, and her act amounted to a lot more than a series of jokes about being short, as I'd anticipated.

Life as a short person is rich with comedy material, and neither did she shy away from topics like body image and life with an average-height husband.

The primarily non-disabled audience were laughing just as much at her tales of overbearing mothers and flatmates from hell as they were at her jokes about life as a short person.

This show was a preview on its way to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and a few jokes needed polishing, but don't let the 10 foot tall spirit put you off...

Ivy Broadhead

• *The Edinburgh Festival Fringe takes place from 5 to 27 August. Tel: 0131 226 0000, www.edfringe.com*



Film



The Flying Scotsman

The Flying Scotsman is a vivid portrayal of the colourful life of Scottish cyclist Graeme Obree (beautifully played by Jonny Lee Miller).

Obree uses competitive cycling as a means of escape from the bullying of his youth, and his single-mindedness breeds ingenuity as he builds a very advanced cycle in his kitchen with no financial

backing, and breaks the world endurance record.

However, his difficult younger years result in low self-esteem and deep depression, and the fears and distrust that Obree has to cope with are graphically portrayed. It is a film of great contrasts, from the abject loneliness of his early life to the exhilaration of his sporting triumphs, echoing the extremes of his moods.

The film also captures the insularity and hopelessness of small town life, where Obree is an outsider. He

does not have the financial support of his rivals and can only rely on the support of those close to him, in particular his wife Anne (Laura Fraser, in another fine performance), and his loyal cycling companion, manager and gofer Malky McGovern (Billy Boyd). Strong parallels are drawn between the isolation that he has faced in his personal life and that which he faces as an anti-establishment loner.

The Flying Scotsman has the courage to address Obree's mental health

problems and dark moods, and is also brave enough to suggest that it was the pain of these experiences that made him such a singular, obsessive person, and such a high achiever.

This film makes you care about a man who is clearly not an easy person to like. As a final accolade it made this reviewer, who knows little about the sport, utterly captivated by the reserves needed and the amount of energy expended in such a gruelling pursuit.

Michael Shamash

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What's on

Theatre

Tales from the Shed, an interactive summer show for children, will be at the Chickenshed theatre in London from 16-21 July. From £2.50. Aimed at children under seven.

• Tel: 020 8292 9222, www.chickenshed.org.uk

Sophie Woolley is bringing her one-woman show, *When to Run*, to the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London from 10-11 July. The shows will be subtitled.

• Tel: 0871 663 2500, www.southbankcentre.co.uk www.sophiewoolley.com

Music

The Beautiful Octopus Club, which includes performers with learning difficulties, will be at the Albany in London at 7pm on 5 July. £7.

• Tel: 020 8692 4446, www.thealbany.org.uk, www.heartnsoul.co.uk

Dance

Sadler's Wells is holding a week-long summer dance school for deaf children at its venue in London from 30 July. The event, which is organised by the National Deaf Children's Society with Green Candle dance company and Sadler's Wells, has a "dance and drum" theme this year.

• Tel/textphone: 0121 234 9820, www.ndcs.org.uk/whatson

Events

Arts charity Shape is holding a written word career development day for disabled people who are budding creative writers on 17 July in Stratford, London, in association with the Arvon Foundation. There will be workshops and speakers, including performers Julie McNamara and Sophie Woolley. Free including lunch.

• Tel: 020 7619 6165, www.shapearts.org.uk

Websites

Shape and London Disability Arts Forum (LDAF) are creating d-art, an online database of disabled people working in arts and creative services in the London area.

• Tel: 020 7619 6160, www.shapearts.org.uk, or LDAF, tel: 020 7739 1133, www.ldaf.org

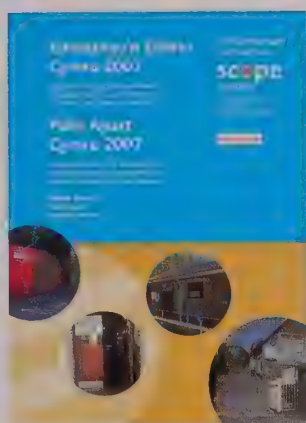
For more What's on:
www.disabilitynow.org.uk

Access barriers at polling stations could have been avoided



Polls Apart Cymru is Scope Cymru's campaign to make the voting process fully accessible to disabled people in Wales.

Our latest survey at the National Assembly of Wales elections on 3rd May 2007 revealed that 70% of polling stations in Wales failed a basic access test.



The 2007 results show that while significant improvements in physical access have been made, major access barriers still exist. Taken as a group, research in 2003, 2004 and 2007 indicates that about two-thirds of polling stations in Wales remain inaccessible.

"My daughter uses a wheelchair and wanted to vote by herself but nothing was set up to enable her to do this. This is infuriating after 12 years."

Polls Apart Cymru respondent, 2007

At face value these results seem disappointing. It would appear that little has changed since the last election. However, the overall statistics do not fully reflect the major improvements in physical access at this election.

Nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of polling stations now have a well designed ramp,

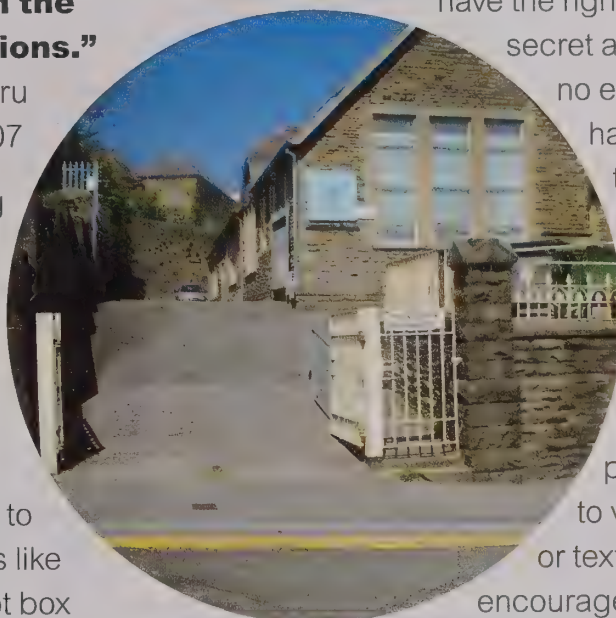
compared to 57 per cent in 2003 and 68 per cent now have level access into the polling station – compared to 46 per cent last time round. In addition 95 per cent have enough space for a disabled person in a wheelchair to move around – up by 5 per cent since the last elections. This is a major achievement and electoral administration officers should be commended for their efforts.

"A member of staff told me they had moved polling stations because each year she complained about bad access in the previous stations."

Polls Apart Cymru respondent, 2007

However, polling stations in Wales were let down by other barriers many of which could have been avoided. Failure to do simple things like putting the ballot box within reach of a wheelchair user and a lack of low-level voting screens all make life more difficult and stressful for disabled voters and yet are easily avoided.

Deaf and visually impaired voters in particular reported a range of access barriers relating to the set up of the polling station which, with a bit more thought, could have easily been removed.



"I spent around 25 minutes at my polling station trying to cast my vote whereas the average voting time for my friends and neighbours was about two to three minutes. The reason? I have sight loss and have a guide dog. The presiding officer had not prepared the polling station for anyone other than able-bodied voters."

Polls Apart Cymru respondent, 2007

Scope Cymru believe that everyone should have the right to vote independently and in secret and disabled people should be no exception. One person who has to vote in the street is one too many.

In addition, the research revealed a burgeoning appetite amongst disabled people for more modern methods of voting. 17% of people said they would prefer to vote via the internet, telephone or text message. Perhaps this will encourage the National Assembly of Wales to try out some more innovative and, crucially, accessible voting methods at the next Assembly election. It appears that many disabled people in Wales are ready for them.

For more information about Polls Apart Cymru or to download a copy of the report go to:
www.pollsapartcymru.org.uk



the pollenshop



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Ynghylch parlys yr ymennydd.
Dros gyfraddcleddeu i bobl ambl.
About cerebral palsy.
For disabled people achieving equality.

Events

Beyond Boundaries will be at Sandown Park, Esher, Surrey from 29-30 June. This new show offers visitors the opportunity to find out about products and services and get involved in a range of activities. *DN* is sponsoring seminars at the event, with speakers including Paralympians Dame Tanni Grey Thompson and Ade Adepitan and X Factor finalist Kerry McGregor. Don't forget to visit *DN* at stand number A126. *Free.* Tel: 020 8614 0833, www.beyondboundarieslive.co.uk

The Choices and Rights Disability Coalition will be holding its Who Says You Can't? conference at the KC Stadium in Hull on 5 July. The event will focus on how disabled people can lead independent and dynamic lifestyles. Speakers include minister for disabled people Anne McGuire and comedian Laurence Clark. Tel: 01482 878778, email: office@choicesandrights.org.uk

Warrington Disability Partnership is holding a disability awareness day at Walton Hall Gardens, Warrington, on 8 July. The event is a finale to a week of events, including music, dance and children's entertainment. Tel: 01925 240064, www.disabilityawarenessday.co.uk

The National Autistic Society (NAS) is holding a one-day seminar on the TEACCH teaching method at the Midland hotel in Derby on 12 July. TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children) aims to prepare people with autism to live and work more effectively at home, school and work. From £105. Tel: 0115 911 3367, email: conference@nas.org.uk, www.autism.org.uk

CHANGE, a charity which supports people with learning difficulties, is holding its CHANGE: Moving Forward conference on 19 July at the Marriott hotel in Leeds. The conference will focus on support for parents with learning difficulties. Tel: 0113 243 0202, www.changepeople.co.uk

TRIPOD (Tri-regional Interest and Project on Learning Disability) is holding its Abuse: The Silent Epidemic? conference on 25 September in Doncaster. The event will discuss the abuse of people with learning difficulties in care services. From £25. Contact Liz Utting, tel: 01302 860319, email: lizt@btinternet.com

Social Firms UK is holding a conference, Enterprise for Employment: Social Firms Achieving the Balance, from 3-4 July at the University of Edinburgh. The event will address the inclusion of people who are disadvantaged in the labour market, including disabled people, and especially those who are starting up and running social firms. Speakers include minister for disabled people Anne McGuire. From £225. Tel: 01737 764021, www.socialfirms.co.uk

Websites

The www.fightforheating.com website, set up by a disabled activist, calls on the government to extend winter fuel payments to severely disabled people under 60, the same objective as *DN*'s own winter fuel payments campaign.

The South West Coast Path, which includes walks around Devon, Cornwall and Dorset, has a new feature on its website detailing accessible parts of the path, including maps, descriptions and photographs. See www.southwestcoastpath.com

The West Midlands Fire Service has revamped its website, which now includes video clips relaying fire safety information in BSL. See www.wmfs.net

The Cornwall Dyslexia Association (CDA) has developed a website which includes accessible features such as a "say it" button which reads the text aloud, and a "textit" bar which allows the user to change the size, colour and font of the text. See www.cornwalldyslexia.org.uk

For getting out and about this summer, check out accessible travel information websites, such as www.gettingaboutgreaterbristol.org, which covers the Bristol/Avon area, and www.gettingabout.info, which covers the Bournemouth and Poole area.

Publications

The National AIDS Trust and the **National Union of Journalists** (NUJ) have published new guidelines on reporting HIV and AIDS accurately and without stigmatisation. The guide includes information on HIV and AIDS and advises on correct language use. *It is downloadable from the NUJ website at www.nuj.org.uk, or tel: 020 7278 7916*

Carers UK has published a booklet for first-time carers, which includes information and advice from experienced carers. Tel: 0845 241 0963, *downloadable from www.carersuk.org*

Centro has published the latest edition of the *Getting Around* access guide, which gives information on accessible public transport in the West Midlands. Available in various formats. Tel: 0121 214 7125,

www.networkwestmidlands.com

Learning difficulties charity **HFT** has produced *The Best of Both Voices*, a booklet aimed at people who work with people with learning difficulties. £4.50. Tel: 01625 269243, *downloadable free from www.hft.org.uk*

Motability has published a new guide containing information and advice on adaptations for customers buying a new car, including adaptations available on the Motability scheme at no extra cost, and the Motability adaptations programme. *Free.* Tel: 0800 093 1000, www.motability.co.uk

Jessica Kingsley Publishers' latest titles include *Counselling People on the Autistic Spectrum* (£15.99) and *The Man who Lost his*

Language: A Case of Aphasia (£13.99). Tel: 020 7833 2307, www.jkp.com

The Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) has updated some of its factsheets, which provide information on equipment, including showers and personal alarm systems. *Free.* Tel: 0845 130 9177, *downloadable from www.dlf.org.uk*

The Royal College of Psychiatrists produces the *Books Beyond Words* series, aimed at people who have difficulties reading, which include stories told through pictures and mime. The latest in the series is *Supporting Victims*, which uses simple pictures to make the criminal justice process more understandable, and guides victims through giving evidence. £10. Tel: 020 7235 2351, www.rcpsych.ac.uk

FOR SALE

Tel: 020 7619 7320, Fax: 020 7619 7331, Minicom: 020 7619 7332, email: manny.singh@scope.org.uk

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RENAULT TRAFIC VAN. Diesel, 2068cc, 32,000 miles, Turquoise, 1997, MOT 2008. Full service history, In good condition, Adapted for one wheelchair passenger plus four other passengers. Electric tail lift, Air suspension. Digital radio/CD player. £4,000 ono. Tel 01372 451103 (Surrey) or viv@bignells.co.uk

VW SHARAN 2.0. Green, P reg (1996), 83k miles. Automotive conversion. VGC, only one owner from new, FSH, MOT Oct 07. Bargain £1,990 ono. Tel: 07796 942035 (Herts) or email: ivan@varecka.co.uk

FIAT DOBLO 1.9. diesel, blue, e/windows, pas. Full wheelchair conversion incl rear ramp and inertia belts, bought from Gleneagles. Seats 4 including wheelchair. Registered Feb 2003, fsh, only 2 owners from new, 17k miles, full year's MOT. Very little use, in excellent condition, £7,500 ono. Tel: 0131 446 0789 (Edinburgh) or email: mgill@merchiston.co.uk

RED RENAULT KANGOO 1.2, 16v engine. Manual, Exceptional condition. 2002 "52" registration, 20k miles, Tax till Jan 08, MOT July 07, Seats 3 plus wheelchair, 2 sliding doors, central remote locking, Power steering, Refurbished by Gowrings 9 months ago - new ramp, carpets, belts, floor coverings, bumpers, spotlight over ramp area. £7,895. Tel 07811 264710 (Worthing, West Sussex) or paulcareless@aol.com

RENAULT CLIO EXPRESSION 1.4, 16V, 2005 with Jeff Gosling hand controls and indicators. 12,500 miles, Silver, Petrol, 5 Door, CD Player. Taxed to March. 13 months warranty. Just carried out (early) 2 year service. VGC. £6,950. Phone 01420 563106 (Hampshire) or email christew@talk-talk.net

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piece ramp. Seats three plus wheelchair. With power steering, ABS, remote central locking, immobiliser, air bag, sliding side doors, radio/cassette. Long MOT. Full Peugeot service history. First class condition throughout. £5,950. Contact Jack Lee. Tel. 01494 526281or 07903 337005 or e-mail: jack.lee9@btinternet.com for full set of photos (South Bucks).

RANGE ROVER SPORT TDV 6 HSE, Black, August 2005, 20,000 miles, 1 owner from new, Diesel, Automatic, Bluetooth, Satnav, Rear and front parking sensors, Aluminium Milford Person lift, which can be fitted in the front passenger or back, further info please look at www.autochair.co.uk. Can be removed by un-doing 4 bolts. Supplied with sling and vidio. All in immaculate condition. Privacy glass, side steps and roof bars. £39,995. Tel: Kevin or Becky 01249 890795 (Swindon).

PEUGEOT AUTOCRUISE HORIZON 2000 (X) Boxer 1.9TD. Purpose built 5 Berth Disabled access motorhome. Only 21000 miles. Wide entrance door, rear hydraulic lift. Wheelchair clamps. Full oven, 3way fridge, Water heater, Blown air heating, Flyscreens & blinds, Heki roof light, Cat 1 Alarm. Cruise control. Air ride suspension. Swivel cab seats. £18,995. Tel: 01752 210768 (Plymouth) or email johndbrooks@sky.com

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only 15,000 miles. 19 feet long. One owner, fsh. Interior professionally designed from new to personal specification for current disabled owner. One piece molded, fully insulated, double skin body. Requires no maintenance. Hydraulic lift at rear, for full wheelchair access. large wheel-in toilet, wheelchair storage, swivel front seat 4 berth, blown air heating, awning, oven, grill, 3 way fridge, blinds and flyscreens. All usual motorhome accessories. Suitable for long distance holidays or local journeys Can send more pictures of inside/outside. £23,500 ono. Must sell Tel: 01727 860098 (Hertfordshire) or geofffall@albanfm.co.uk

RENAULT KANGOO 1.2 Expression, Constables conversion lowered floor, wheelchair access ramp and inertia reel belts. Seats 3 plus wheelchair. First registered Jan 04, MOT April 08, FSH, 23k miles. PAS, electric windows and mirrors, CD/radio. New exhaust system, front discs and pads. £7,250 ono. Tel: 01243 828588 (Bognor Regis) or e-mail rsalmon@dsl.pipex.com

MERCEDES VITO 2.0 5-door van, 52 reg, blue, coded stereo, pas, abs. With GM Coachwork wheelchair conversion incl pneumatic foldaway lift and chair. Can carry up to 3 wheelchairs and 4 passengers. Only 2 owners from new, in excellent condition and only 24k miles. £9,500 ono. Tel: 01752 770859 (Plymouth) or mobile: 07933 676400.

VW MOTORHOME 2.0 Autosleeper Trooper with wheelchair clamping and ramps. 98 reg (R reg), 34k miles, fsh, £12,500 ono. Tel: 0161 485 3688 (Stockport area) or email: lenheywood@hotmail.com

Wheelchairs/scooters

MONAMI ELECTRIC SCOOTER. 4-wheel buggy, 350W 24V DC standard, speed 4mph. 9 months old, excellent condition, hardly used. New £1,500, sell £1,000. Purpose-built shed also available to buy. Buyer to collect. Tel: 01259 743772 or 07879 403401 (Clackmann. Scotland).

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01 VW Transporter Tdi, 42,000 Miles. Folding Ramp/Winch, 4 Seats	£9995
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RENAULT TRAFIC SWB 1.9 DCI Registered: 08/09/03, Blue, 6 seats, 6 speed manual, 26,000 miles, Air Bag, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Power Steering, Radio/single CD player, Remote Central Locking, Service History, Side load door, Twin front passenger seat, Three rear saloon passenger seats. **£11,295**

FIAT SCUDO COMBI MONTANA 2.0 JTD Registered: 05/04/03, Blue, 3 seats, manual, 30,000 miles, 5 door, Air conditioning, Electric Mirrors, Electric reels, Electric windows, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, One rear saloon seat, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Remote Central Locking, Service History. **£9,995 plus VAT**

CITROEN DISPATCH WINDOW 1.9 DIESEL Registered: 01/04/02, Red, 4 seats, 1 owner, Manual, 44,000 miles, Electric reels, Electric Winch, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, Non-Slip Flooring, Power Steering, Radio/cassette player, Remote Central Locking, Service History, Single front passenger seat, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **£7,995**

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RENAULT MASTER SWB 2.5 DCI TURBO DIESEL Registered: 10/12/03, Blue, 5 seats, 1 owner, Manual, 48,000 miles, Air Bag, Could take 2 wheelchairs, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Power Steering, Radio/single CD player, Remote Central Locking, Service History, Short wheelbase, Side load door, Twin front passenger seat, Two rear saloon passenger seats. **£9,995**

FIAT SCUDO COMBI 1.9 LTR DIESEL Registered: 06/07/99, Red, 3 seats, Manual, 94,000 miles, 5 door, Electric reels, Electric Winch, Full Width Lightweight Ramp, Lowered rear floor for wheelchair access, One rear saloon seat, Power Steering, Service History, Twin Side Doors. **£3,000**

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Holidays (cont'd pg 29)
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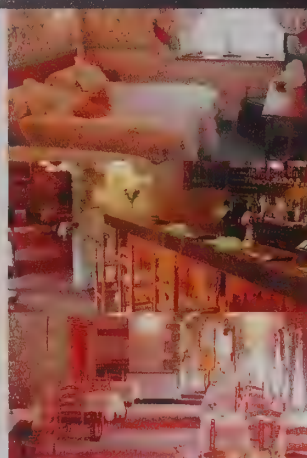
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This year's dates: 19th to 24th and 24th to 27th August 2007

For further information call 01206 383226; email info@merseafestival.org.uk or visit the website: www.merseafestival.org.uk


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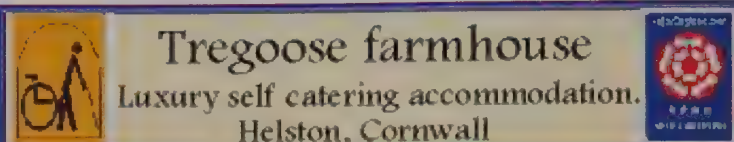
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• Holidays (cont'd pg 30)



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offer to pay using
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Although no **DN** readers
to our knowledge have
been hit by this, please
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of accepting cheques
from overseas. For more
information, visit the
Metropolitan Police
website.

DEADLINE

Disability Now August 2007 published
28 July. Classified deadlines:
Booking: 13 July. Copy: 17 July.

DN Extra July 2007 published 7 July.
Classified deadlines: Booking and
Copy: 27 June.

QUICKIE RX5 MANUAL wheelchair, Glitter effect framework. Mint condition, Used twice. Cost new £1500, now £600 complete with wheel guards, Cushion and tray. Must collect. Helenjohnson33@aol.com (S Yorks).

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Recruitment (on page 30 to 31)

Welcome to working in Bristol

Culture & Leisure Services

Bristol City Council is committed to extending the voice and influence of children and young people. Our Youth and Play Services (YPS) is taking the lead role in making this happen by promoting the values of democracy, empowerment and equality. YPS provides that informal education and training which prepares young people for life. We are looking for committed and enthusiastic individuals to join the service.

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Ref: 11703

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Ref: 11704

Youth & Community Worker

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Lawrence Weston Youth Work Team

Ref: 11705

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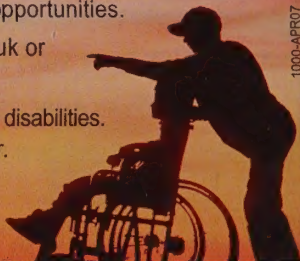
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DN next month*All the best news, views and jobs. Available 28 July***RIGHTS FIGHT:** Disabled people march on Westminster in support of a right to independent living**AMERICAN IDOL:** An interview with Andrew Imparato, head of the USA's leading organisation of disabled people**FILE CLOSED:** We complete our seven-month investigation into how poverty affects disabled people

• Recruitment (on page 30 to 31)



Dada-South, the disability arts development agency for the South East is looking to recruit up to 10 dynamic Deaf and Disabled Artists to join **Dada-Exchange** as;

Disabled Artist Advisors

Freelance contracts (4 days per year @ £175 per day plus paid Training & Continuing Professional Development)

Dada-Exchange, the Disabled Artists' Advisors Network, supporting and inspiring the professional and creative development of Deaf and Disabled artists in the South East.

Please contact Suzanne Rose, Professional Development Manager for an informal discussion and further information

For application packs please send a large stamped addressed envelope to:
Dada-South (Recruitment), PO Box 136, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 9AD or email info@dada-south.org.uk
Or you can tel/fax: (01580) 714642.

These positions are specifically for Deaf and Disabled Artists in the South East region

Deadline for applications: Tuesday 10th July 2007

all ways learning



• Survey

CHARGING FOR SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

A leading disability charity is investigating the impact on disabled people of tightening eligibility criteria for social care.

Have you recently been refused any publicly funded social care services, or had any withdrawn following an assessment by your Local Authority? Has this left you without care or paying for your own social care services?

Would you like to speak out about your experience? Any information received will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Our researchers can be contacted on 0800 107 5052, leaving your name, a return telephone number and a time of day when a researcher can ring and ask you some questions.

We will pay £25 for each full interview conducted. We cannot guarantee to interview everyone as we are looking to cover a wide range of experiences.

CONDITIONS

Disability Now maintains the right to amend or withdraw lineage adverts without prior notice. All adverts must comply with the British Code of Advertising Practice.

Telephone numbers and addresses will not be placed in personal adverts, for confidentiality. Instead, Box numbers will be provided. Likewise, telephone numbers and addresses will not be given out over the telephone if requested.

Box Numbers can be requested for non-personal adverts. However, it may limit the response to it. If you want to advertise documents, goods or services contact Patrick Durham-Matthews tel: 020 7619 7320, fax: 020 7619 7331.

Lineage adverts can only be used by private individuals. All commercial enquiries must be addressed to Patrick Durham-Matthews (see contact details above).

DN cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage of adverts or letters during forwarding. It is the responsibility of the advertiser to check the content of their advert, and to ensure any abbreviations cannot be misunderstood.

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Brown's wait is over
But will he deliver on disability?

